



Class BX9943

Book .S8I6

Copyright N^o

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

THE IMAGE OF GOD
AND
OTHER SERMONS

The Image of God

AND

Other Sermons

By
EDWIN C. SWEETSER, D.D.

*Pastor Emeritus, Church of the Messiah
Philadelphia, Pa.*



NEW YORK CHICAGO
Fleming H. Revell Company
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

Copyright, 1923, by
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

BX9943
S8I6

© Cl A711253

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 17 North Wabash Ave.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 75 Princes Street

JUL 19 '23

Foreword

THESE sermons are published with a hope that they will be helpful to at least some of their readers. They have been chosen with reference to certain questions which are of great importance to every one; and to such of their readers as listened to them when they were preached in the Universalist Church of the Messiah, in Philadelphia, they may call up pleasant recollections of a ministry of many years.

E. C. S.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Contents

I. THE IMAGE OF GOD	9
<i>Matt. 22:20</i>	
II. THE INCARNATION	19
<i>John 1:14, 16</i>	
III. THE MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST	28
<i>John 10:24, 25</i>	
IV. THE BASIS OF OUR BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY	40
<i>I Pet. 1:3, 4 [R. V.]</i>	
V. WILL CHRIST RETURN TO THIS WORLD?	50
<i>Matt. 16:24, 27, 28</i>	
VI. THE TRIUMPHAL PROGRESS OF CHRIST	61
<i>Mark 11:1-9</i>	
VII. THE EXTERMINATION OF EVIL	70
<i>Matt. 15:13</i>	
VIII. THE STORY OF JONAH	79
<i>Jonah 3:1, 2</i>	
IX. GOD'S ELECT: WHO AND WHY?	89
<i>Rom. 8:33</i>	
X. THINKING AND BEING	98
<i>Prov. 23:6, 7; Phil. 4:8</i>	
XI. HAVING AND BEING	106
<i>Matt. 19:21</i>	
XII. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF TRUTH	115
<i>John 18:38</i>	

XIII. BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE	124
<i>Job 42:12</i>	
XIV. ABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY . . .	134
<i>Matt. 25:14, 15</i>	
XV. TRANSFORMATION BY CONTEMPLATION .	142
<i>II Cor. 3:18</i>	
XVI. THE HOUSE OF GOD	150
<i>Gen. 28:17</i>	
XVII. THE BOW IN THE CLOUD	158
<i>Gen. 9:12-15</i>	
XVIII. MAKING A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY . .	167
<i>Matt. 16:21</i>	
XIX. AN ANTIDOTE FOR WORRYING . . .	175
<i>Phil. 4:5-7 [R. V.]</i>	
XX. THE INHERITANCE OF THE MEEK . . .	184
<i>Matt. 5:5</i>	
XXI. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN	194
<i>Acts 26:32</i>	
XXII. A PRECIOUS SECRET	202
<i>Psa. 25:14</i>	
XXIII. THE PARABLE OF THE EMPTY HOUSE .	211
<i>Matt. 12:43-45</i>	
XXIV. AS A FOOL DIETH	220
<i>II Sam. 3:33 [R. V.]</i>	
XXV. OUR HEAVENLY HOME	229
<i>Eccl. 12:5</i>	

I

THE IMAGE OF GOD

"Whose is this image and superscription?"—MATT. 22:20.

IN the picture gallery at Dresden there is a famous painting by Titian, representing the incident which occasioned this question. Entitled "Christ and the Tribute Money," it pictures Jesus face to face with one of the crafty conspirators who attempted to beguile Him into making some statement that would furnish them with a plausible accusation against Him.

The man holds a piece of money at which Jesus is pointing, and his aquiline countenance has a wily expression which betokens his character. His lips are compressed, his eyes are deep set, and from under his beetling brows he scans the face of the Saviour while awaiting His answer to the problem which he has set for Him, as to whether the Jews should pay tribute to Cæsar. Jesus slightly inclines His head towards him, and meets his look with a counter look which seems to penetrate his soul—a look so clear, so unwavering, so profound, and so kindly that it altogether overmasters his expression of craftiness—as He quietly says to him, "Whose is this image and superscription?"

The coin is a denarius, imprinted with an image of the Roman Emperor; and so the man truly answers, "Cæsar's." But, unconsciously, he is exhibiting to his questioner not only a piece of money but his own inner nature, his own soul, his own selfhood; and Jesus sees an image there as well as on the piece of money, an

imprint and a superscription which signify something of the highest importance with reference to the man himself; and so He seizes the opportunity to teach him a great lesson, and through him to teach it to the world. "Render," He says, "unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Imprinted on the piece of money He sees an image of the Roman Emperor. In the man who is holding it He sees an image of God. Hence the peculiar fitness of the question which He puts to him, and the importance of the answer with which He sends him away.

Let us endeavour to grasp the significance of the great truth which the Saviour's question and answer imply—the truth that every human being bears the image of God.

That is one of the primary truths of the Bible. It appears in the very first chapter of Genesis, where we are told that, after God had made the animal world, He created man in His own image and commanded him to multiply and replenish the earth. Perhaps Jesus had that passage of Scripture in mind when He utilized the coin to enforce its significance. At all events, there it stands, and His language agrees with it. Man is made in God's image. He was made so in the beginning, and by that fact he is differentiated, with a difference as wide as that between heaven and earth, from every other creature that inhabits this world.

When God made man in His own image He created a new category, a new order of beings, distinctly marked off from the merely animal world, and so vastly different and superior that there was practically no sort of relation between them. Between the first human being and every other creature inhabiting the earth there was a gulf with no bridge, a difference so

profound that it could by no means be crossed from either side to the other.

I say this with full knowledge of the prevalent theory that the human race was evolved from a merely animal ancestry; and far be it from me to deny the doctrine of evolution as an explanation of the method by which the Creator made the bodies of the first human beings. To that extent it may be true, with some modifications. Exactly how the first human beings were made has not yet been revealed to us. But, whatever the method, the fact remains that they were so different from all other creatures, and so unspeakably superior to even the best of them, as to constitute a new order. There was something in the first man which was not in the lower animals nor in any way derived from them, something divine which directly allied him to God. If the process of evolution was used in creating him, it was used only as a preparation for that which came after it,—just as the process of money-making up to the time when the imprint is put on the coin, or the signature is affixed to the bank note, is only preparatory to the final operation without which there would not be any money at all.

When you have dug the ore from the depths of the mine, and have crushed it and smelted it and separated the metal, you have no money in your possession, if that is all that you have done. And when you have taken the metal to the mint, and have had it alloyed, and then rolled, and then cut into pieces of the particular size and shape of the coins which you desire, you still have no money, if that is all that you have done. You have nothing but a certain number of pieces of metal. But put one of those pieces into the stamping machine, and a single quick stroke makes a different thing of it. No longer is it merely a piece of metal. It

is a piece of metal plus something which was not in the metal, something which is not metallic nor even material, but which gives it a higher value and a different function, something which makes money of it. The government's imprint does that. In an instant it works the remarkable transformation. On a metallic foundation it superimposes a monetary character and creates a value which had no existence before.

Even so when God made man, no matter by what process He made the animal part of him or how long a time He took in making it, there came a time when He added to that physical basis something that was not physical, something not pertaining to the animal world, something quite distinct from it and far superior to it; and that was His own image. He put His own imprint on the being whom He had made, and that imprint conferred the character and the prerogatives of manhood. Without that imprint there can be no manhood. With it, there stands a human being, allied as to his body with the physical world, but as to his soul with the spirit of God.

That is what is meant by being made in God's image. It consists in the fact that man possesses a spiritual nature—that he himself is a spirit, finite in degree, even as God is a spirit, the Infinite One. "God is a spirit," said Jesus to the woman of Samaria; and in the epistle to the Hebrews He is called "the Father of spirits." Spirit is spirit wherever it is found. It is essentially the same thing whether in God or in man. Every spiritual being is made by the Father of spirits in His own spiritual likeness, and, having a nature like His own, is necessarily His child. That is what came into existence when, as the book of Genesis says, "man became a living soul."

Moreover, the fact that man was thus made in the image of God involved his participation in all of those qualities by which spirit is always and everywhere signalized—consciousness, intelligence, thought, will, and affection, together with immortality. Spirit is conscious of its own existence, it thinks, it reasons, it wills, it loves, and it lives forever. There is nothing about it which is susceptible of decay. God possesses all of those qualities; and when He created man in His own image as a spiritual being, He imparted all of them to him as a matter of course. In the very nature of the case, the child inherited those qualities from the paternal Spirit who created him.

Now, man has never lost that image. He is still a spiritual being, with all that is implied thereby.

There are some people who contend that when man became sinful he lost the image of God. They would have us believe that the first human being was a holy as well as a spiritual being, and that when he forfeited his holiness he altogether forfeited his resemblance to God, and became a totally depraved being, a child of the devil, and subject to death. But there is nothing in the Bible, or in human experience, to sustain such a theory.

There is nothing to indicate, in the first place, that the first human beings were ever possessed of holiness. If so, they would not have sinned; for a holy being cannot sin; it is morally impossible. Man's likeness to God consisted not in his moral character, but in his spiritual nature. A child may be in the likeness of his father even though he is not nearly as good as his father. And so the first human beings, imperfect though they were and easily tempted to sin, were nevertheless in the image of their heavenly Father; and so

are all other human beings, no matter how imperfect or sinful they are.

Instead of saying that, when he sinned, man was deprived of the image of God, the Bible repeatedly speaks of him as possessing that image long after he had transgressed the commandments of God.

For example, we are told in the ninth chapter of Genesis that, after the flood had occurred, the shedding of man's blood was divinely forbidden for the reason that man was made in the image of God. If he had long since lost that image, such a reason for the prohibition would have had no validity.

In the eleventh chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, it is said that a man ought not to cover his head when he prays, "forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God." And in the third chapter of the epistle of James we are told that the tongue is an unruly member, for "therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, who are made after the similitude of God."

No, man has not lost the original image of God. If he had, he would be no longer human. That which is lost, in a certain sense, is not the image of God, but that on which the image of God is imprinted. Human souls may be lost, as millions of them are; but, however lost they may be, they cannot lose the divine image which betokens their humanity. To use the Saviour's own simile, it is not the image, but the coin, which is lost by its owner. The lost piece of money which the woman sought till she found it, and which Jesus used to represent the lost condition of men, was a piece of money none the less when it was lost than before. It still retained the image which gave it its value. And so mankind, however sinful, still retain the divine im-

print which allies them to God, and which is the principal consideration that makes them worth saving.

And, oh, what a wonderful imprint it is which the Father Almighty has put on mankind! What a nature He has given to us! What dignity, what dominion, what capacity for knowledge, what endless possibilities for advancement in glory!

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man,” said the Psalmist, “that Thou art mindful of him!”—which may be taken as an expression of astonishment that the Creator of the universe should deign to notice mankind or as an expression of wonderment at the dignity and power which He has conferred on mankind. Whether the first of those sentiments was in the mind of the Psalmist may be open to question, but not so of the other one. “For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,” said he, “and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.”

When we let our thoughts dwell on the extent of the universe and the marvels of creation which modern science reveals to us, we are likely to be overwhelmed temporarily with a feeling of our own littleness and comparative insignificance. When we are told, for example, that the double star which the astronomers call Alpha Centauri is twenty-five billions of miles from the earth, and that, although it looks like a single bright speck in the sky, it really consists of two suns which are revolving around each other, and which are from a billion to three billions of miles from each other, the mind becomes lost in the thought of such immensities.

We are staggered in attempting to conceive of such distances. And when we consider, furthermore, that that particular double star is only one of many such, and is the nearest of all of them, and that when we should have traveled to even the farthest of them we should be only, as it were, at the outer porch of the universe, the thought arises, in spite of us,—what a pigmy is man, what an infinitesimal dot in the universe! Why, the world on which we live is but a dot in the universe, and we are dots on the dot, no larger in comparison than the animalcules in a drop of water in comparison with us. What presumption, then, some persons may say, to imagine that the Creator, the Infinite One, who holds the Milky Way itself, with all of its thousands upon thousands of suns, as a very little thing in the hollow of His hand, has any regard for us or pays any attention to us! What more are we to Him than so many animalcules, swarming, feeding, fighting, and dying in the confines of a muddy puddle? That view of the matter will sometimes present itself.

But look at the same facts in a different way. How do we know that the Milky Way consists of thousands of thousands of suns, systems, and nebulae? How do we know that the speck of light which we call Alpha Centauri is in reality two stupendous suns revolving around each other at such immense distances? How do we know that one of them, although it is no heavier, is a great deal larger than the other, and that one of their revolutions around each other requires eighty-one years? How do we, animalcules though we are in our physical proportions, have knowledge of such amazing facts in regard to the far away parts of the universe? Ah, that is where the dignity of our nature reveals itself. That is where our superiority to material things

is disclosed. It is because we have minds, intellectual natures, which far transcend our fleshly bodies. It is because we are spirits, and, like the Infinite Spirit, can command the laws of the universe and make its forces our ministers. If man were measured only by his physical proportions, he would indeed be nothing more than an insignificant creature; but that is not the right way to measure him: for, as the poet Watts has well declared, "The mind's the standard of the man." He must be judged by his intellectual and spiritual qualities. And there he soars, rising far above all material limitations.

"O God, I think Thy thoughts after Thee," said Kepler, when he had discovered the wonderful law in accordance with which the orbits of the planets are determined; and that is what all of us do, more or less. We think God's thoughts after Him; and, by virtue of that power and the spiritual nature which possesses it, a human being is as far superior to the whole solar system as a baby is superior to the house which contains it, no matter how splendid the structure may be; and when it shall have disappeared, leaving "not a rack behind," he himself will still be rejoicing in the glory to which his likeness to his heavenly Father entitles him. Marvel of marvels, that within these puny fleshly bodies we have a nature so sublime, so divinely imprinted with likeness to God!

Such being the case, what is our duty because of it? Since we are made in God's image, what ought we to do?

"Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's"—nothing less than that is the duty of every one. Every human being rightfully belongs unto God, and is under an obligation

as everlasting as himself to devote himself to God's service. It is both his duty and his privilege thus to devote himself, with all of the varied powers which his Creator has given him. Having inherited a godlike nature, he ought to live in a godlike manner. And only by so doing can he accomplish his destiny. Only so can any of us walk worthy of the nature which the Creator has given us and attain to the blessedness for which He created us. Not to do so is grievously to wrong our own spirits at the same time that we grieve His Holy Spirit. It is to be like a lost coin, or a coin rusting in uselessness, which ought to be brightened by continual usefulness.

When Wendell Phillips was only fourteen years of age, he heard a sermon by Lyman Beecher, entitled "You Belong to God." Returning to his home, he went directly to his own room, and fervently prayed that God would help him to live a truly righteous life. "O God," said he, "I belong to Thee. Take what is Thine own"; and from that time forth he felt that he was irrevocably pledged to God's service.

Blessed be God, that He has made us in His own image! Gladly let us consecrate ourselves to His service. Henceforth let every one of us say, in the meditations of his heart and by means of his conduct, "O God, I belong to Thee. Take what is Thine own."

II

THE INCARNATION

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth . . . and of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace."—JOHN I: 14, 16.

HISTORY tells us that, at the time of his death, the apostle John was in the ninety-fifth year of his age. As Jesus had predicted, he lived till after the fall of the city of Jerusalem, the dispersion of the Jewish nation, and the establishment of Christianity as the manifestation of God's kingdom on earth. Before he passed away Christian churches had multiplied, especially along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Sufficient time had then elapsed for the introduction of certain false doctrines among them, owing to the prevalence of philosophical theories which some people mistakenly tried to combine with Christianity. Thus arose what is called the Gnostic heresy, in view of which the apostle wrote that part of his gospel, commonly known as its proem, of which my text is a portion.

The Gnostics were a set of people who claimed superior knowledge; and, according to their teaching, the material universe was not created by God, but by a subordinate being who was one of a long series of emanations from God, to whom they gave the name of æons. They said that God was too holy and too spiritual in His nature to have created a universe which contains evil elements; and so they held that this uni-

verse, including humanity, was made by the lowest of that series of emanations, the æon whom they called the *logos*. Another was called by a Greek name whose meaning is life, and another by a name whose meaning is light; and the whole series, taken together, was called the *pleroma*, which means the fulness of the emanations proceeding from God. Each of them was supposed to be a spiritual being and to have a certain measure of creative ability.

There is no word in our language which exactly corresponds to the Greek word *logos*. It cannot be exactly translated into English. Indeed, like some of our own words, it has various meanings. Thought, reason, speech, expression, power, energy,—each of those terms corresponds to some aspect or phase of its meaning; but we have no single term or phrase with precisely the same meaning that the word *logos* conveyed. Our English words logic and logical are derived from it, and the expression “logical cause” comes pretty near to the meaning which the Gnostics probably gave to it when they used it as the name of the imaginary æon who, according to their philosophy, created the world.

They furthermore taught that, to deliver mankind from the element of evil which the *logos* had put into them, another æon, higher in the series, had come to this world, and had been manifested to mankind as the Lord Jesus Christ; and, inasmuch as all flesh was supposed to be evil, they said that Jesus, instead of having a material body, had only the semblance of such a body with which to appear among men, and that he only apparently lived a human life and only apparently died on the cross.

In view of that fantastic theory, St. John wrote the

proem of the wonderful gospel in which he has recorded the life and teachings of Christ. And his meaning would be somewhat clearer if, instead of saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," the translators of the passage had rendered it in this way: "In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God"; for *logos* is the term which he actually used, and, instead of meaning "word" in our sense of the expression, it rather means the creative cause.

In this proem, the apostle emphasizes the real truth of Christianity in opposition to the nonsensical theory of the Gnostics. With a few vigorous sentences he brushes away the whole series of imaginary æons between God and mankind, together with the Gnostic theory as to the nature of Christ; and, referring the creation of all things directly to God, he declares that Jesus Christ was human not only in appearance but also in fact, that He had a body of flesh, and that in Him was incarnated the actual *pleroma*, the real fulness of divine qualities, to which spiritual life and light belong. He says that the *logos* which created the world, instead of being a remote emanation from God, whose influence was to be counteracted by Christ, was with God in the beginning, and was nothing but God's own activity—God's thought, God's energy, God's reason and wisdom and power and love—which is the same as saying that it was God Himself. And, furthermore, he says that Christ, instead of being only an emanation from God, masquerading in the semblance of a real human being, was an actual human incarnation of all of the divine attributes by which the world was created—that in Him was light,

and in Him was life, and in Him was a full revelation of God.

That is not saying that Jesus was God. It is saying that God was in Jesus, fully manifesting the divine attributes by which, in the beginning, He created the world. The apostle does not say that in the beginning there were two persons, each of whom was God, and that one of them, called the *logos*, became incarnate in Christ. He simply uses the word *logos* as a name for God's attributes, which he identifies with God Himself, as when he elsewhere says that God is love; and then he says that those attributes in their glorious totality were embodied and revealed in Christ; as St. Paul also teaches in his epistle to the Colossians, where he says that "in him dwelleth all the fulness (*pleroma*) of the Godhead bodily."

That is the unspeakably glorious truth which we celebrate on Christmas day—the truth that when Jesus Christ was born there came into this world a human being in whom God so incarnated His own divine attributes that He represents God to us, and is a perfect revelation of God's character and desires and intentions concerning us.

If you ask for an explanation of it—as to the method by which God was incarnate in Christ, or as to the exact nature of the relation between them—you ask for the explanation of an insoluble mystery. As the apostle declares, "Great is the mystery of godliness; he who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory." Jesus Himself said, "No one knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any one the Father save the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." We

know the Father through Jesus Christ; but God only knows just how He so dwelt in Jesus Christ as to make that revelation possible. We have the wonderful Biblical story of the birth and the life and the resurrection of Christ. From beginning to end it is exceptional, marvelous, incomprehensible by our human intelligence. But that is no reason for rejecting or doubting it. A fact does not depend on our knowledge concerning it, neither is it invalidated by our ignorance concerning it. We may believe it and utilize it without understanding it. And it is a glorious fact that, in a way which at present is beyond our comprehension, God so dwelt in Jesus Christ as to reveal Himself to us, and finally to reconcile the whole family of mankind to Himself.

Never was there another such glorious revelation. There have been other manifestations of the divine nature and attributes, but none to compare with that which is given in Christ.

God is revealed to some extent through what we call the laws and the forces of Nature and the results which they produce for the good of mankind. As the Scripture declares, "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead"; and, again, "In times past He suffered all nations to walk in their own ways; nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." All of our material blessings are owing to the creative power and goodness of God, and are to some extent manifestations thereof. We should take them as such; and when we eat our daily bread it should be with a thankful realization of the truth that

*“ Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
And back of the flour the mill,
And back of the mill are the wheat and the shower,
And the sun and the Father’s will.”*

Ah, yes, back of all of our material blessings, and back of Nature itself, is the creative energy of God—His providence, His wisdom, His power, His love. The divine *logos*, which was with Him in the beginning, is the cause of all created things, and through His visible works we get some intimation of His nature and character; still further intimations of which have been given to us through godly men who spoke as His Holy Spirit informed and directed them. At sundry times and in divers manners He had so spoken to the world before the advent of Christ.

But all such revelations were very faint and imperfect, compared with that which He has given to us through His Son Jesus Christ. They were as candle-light to sunlight, in comparison with the gospel. In Jesus Christ there was so perfect an expression of God’s nature and character that He could truthfully say, “ He who hath seen me hath seen the Father; I am in the Father and the Father in me; I and my Father are one.” In Him the divine *logos* was so completely embodied that he identified Himself with it as God’s representative, saying, “ I came down from heaven ”; “ Before Abraham was, I am ”; “ I am the light of the world ”; “ I am the bread of life ”; “ I am the resurrection and the life ”; “ As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself ”; and “ All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” No other human being would ever have been justified in using such language;

but Jesus Christ was fully justified, because of the great truth which is set forth in my text.

Of course, we cannot understand it; the mystery is too great for us. But an illustration may help us to grasp its significance.

Astronomers tell us that the sun is surrounded by a luminous envelope, consisting of certain rarefied substances which are being continually generated by it. That envelope is called the photosphere. It proceeds from the sun, and is really a part of the sun, and without it the sun would be invisible. It is from the photosphere that we derive both the light and the heat; so that to us it is practically a revelation of the sun, or the sun in the process of revealing itself.

Suppose that a portion of the photosphere should be sent to this world, and here be formed into a glorious orb for our benefit. What a difference there would be between such a representative of the heavenly luminary and even the best of those light-giving and heat-giving agencies which have hitherto been given to us! They are all indirectly derived from the sun; but the photospheric orb might say, I am the light and the heat of the sun; he that hath seen me hath seen the sun.

Even so in Jesus Christ there was such a perfect incarnation of God's nature and character that He could truthfully use such language as that which I have quoted. In Him "the sun of righteousness" is clearly revealed to us: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

That is what the whole human race was waiting for. It had believed in God, in some fashion, for thousands of years; but it knew not whether to think of Him as

one or as many, as good or as evil, as worthy to be trusted or only to be feared; and deep down in the hearts of men there was an ineradicable yearning for a trustworthy answer to the great questions which natural religion was asking. "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!" said the suffering patriarch; and in that saying he gave voice to the desire of all nations—a desire which is satisfactorily answered in Christ. Christ is God's answer to that longing of humanity.

Well might the angels rejoice at His advent; well might the wise men bring their gifts to His cradle; and well may all people unite in His praise. With His advent a new era began in this world. As when the sun arises above the horizon, the light thereof increases and spreads wider and wider as it mounts to the zenith, so, ever since the Saviour's advent, His gospel has been steadily extending its influence, carrying spiritual life and light to the minds and souls of mankind. Grace and truth have come by Him, and of His fulness have we all received. To Him we are indebted for our knowledge of God's fatherhood and of universal human brotherhood. To Him we owe our faith in a blessed immortality. To Him we look up as our model of perfectness, and from Him come the principles of our civilization. Let us, then, heartily rejoice in His advent, and commemorate it not only with Christmas observances but with consecrated Christian lives.

In mediæval times, when a church bell was being moulded, it was customary for the people to cast some of their golden and silver ornaments into the mass of molten metal, in order to make it ring more sweetly. And, to them at least, it must have rung more sweetly than it otherwise would; because, whenever they heard

its tones, it appealed not only to their hearing but to their memories and their affections and their consciousness of self-sacrifice in the service of Christ. Every ornament they had cast into it made it sound the more sweetly. The more richly they had given to it, the more sweetly it gave back to them.

Would you also have the Christmas bells sound more and more sweetly as long as you live? Then mingle with your rejoicings over the advent of Christ some self-sacrifice for Him, some evidence of consecration to Him, that you may have the precious consciousness of contributing something to make known His way upon the earth, His saving health among all nations. Freely every one of us has received of His fulness; freely let us give to Him such gifts as He desires of us, and thereby assist Him to hasten the day when He shall have drawn the whole family of mankind to Himself and, as the result of His ministry, God shall be all in all.

III

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST

“The Jews therefore came round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou hold us in suspense? If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believe not; the works that I do in my Father’s name, these bear witness of me.”—JOHN 10: 24, 25.

IF the New Testament gives us a reliable history of the ministry of Jesus Christ, He did a great many very wonderful things,—which in our translation are sometimes called miracles, sometimes wonders, sometimes signs, and sometimes works,—things which no other human being could do, and which apparently indicated that He either possessed supernatural power or was assisted by some being or beings who did. We are told, for example, not only that He cured all manner of diseases without any medicine, instantaneously healing the blind and the deaf and the leprous and the paralyzed, but that He even raised the dead to life, quelled a tempest without any visible means, walked upon the waves of the sea, transformed water into wine, fed thousands of people with a few loaves and fishes, and, after suffering a horrible death on the cross, returned to life, and arose from the grave, and continued to live in this world for about forty days, at the end of which time He was taken up into heaven. A large part of the four gospels is devoted to an account of such miraculous deeds and of the comments which they elicited, nearly a fifth of the entire history having reference to such matters.

And, furthermore, if the record is true, Jesus not only claimed for Himself the power to perform such miracles, but claimed that His performance of them was an evidence of His Messiahship.

At the very outset of His ministry, when the Jewish rulers challenged Him, and demanded a sign of His authority for driving the money-changers out of the temple, His answer was, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," referring thereby to the crowning miracle of His resurrection from the grave. When John the Baptist, in his prison cell, began to have some doubt about Him, and sent messengers to ask Him whether He was really the Messiah, His answer was, "Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." To His disciples He said, on the night of the Last Supper, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake." And of those who had rejected Him He said, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father": which agrees with what He said to His questioners on the occasion to which my text refers. "If thou art the Christ," said they, "tell us plainly"; to which He answered, "I told you, and ye believe not; the works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me."

Nothing can be plainer, if the New Testament is true, than that Jesus habitually appealed to His miracles as an evidence of His Messiahship. Ordinary works, such as any good man might perform, would have proved nothing in regard to it; they would have

indicated no peculiar relation to God, and He could not have referred to them in support of His claim.

Not that the mere fact of working miracles would have proved Him to be the Christ, nor that He ever claimed that it would. According to the record, He based His claim not simply on the fact of His working miracles, but on the character of His miracles, taken in connection with the character of His teachings. He claimed that His teachings were supported by His miracles, because, taken in conjunction, they showed that He was acting in conjunction with God. The works to which He appealed were those which He did in His father's name; and He appealed to them because they were such as might reasonably be expected of Him if He taught the truth in regard to God and His own relation to God: and that fact should always be borne in mind when we are considering the credibility of His claim. "We know that thou art a teacher come from God," said Nicodemus, "for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him"; and, if the record is reliable, that is exactly what Jesus maintained—that the character of His miracles supported His claim to be a teacher sent from God, because it was incredible that a false pretender should perform not only such miraculous but such beneficent works.

And as Jesus Himself appealed to them as signs of His peculiar relation to God, so did His apostles, according to the record. After narrating the miracle of changing water into wine, the apostle John says, "This beginning of miracles"—or, as the Revised Version renders it, "This beginning of his signs"—"did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed on him"; and near the close of His

gospel, after telling of the resurrection, he says, "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing ye may have life in his name." And St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, said to his hearers that Jesus was a man approved of God among them by mighty works and wonders and signs which God had done by Him in their midst, as they themselves also knew.

Even His enemies, we are told, did not deny that He actually performed such works. They acknowledged the fact, but attributed it to the aid of demoniac powers.. They refused to acknowledge that His miracles were a sign of His Christhood, partly because, as He told them, they were not of His sheep, and would not listen to His voice, nor believe in Him even though He should rise from the dead, and partly because their conception of the Messiah was that of a temporal and military ruler who would free them from the yoke of Rome and exalt them to a leading position among the nations of the world. When they demanded a sign of Him in proof of His Messiahship, that was the kind of Messiahship which they wished Him to prove. Of that He of course would give them no sign, and to them His miracles were no sign that He was really the Messiah whom the nation was looking for.

But while they, in their hostility to Him, refused to acknowledge that His wonderful works were a sign of His Christhood, many others did acknowledge it; and, as Renan has admitted, skeptical though he was in regard to the miracles, Christianity would never have made any headway if the early Christians had not believed in them. Belief in them was bound up with the

faith of the early Church in the divine Sonship of Jesus, and the Church could not have survived without it.

How is it today? Ought we also to believe in them? Can we reasonably believe in them? In answer to that question, let me say in the first place, that, in order to be logical, we must either believe in them or reject the whole of the New Testament as unworthy of credence so far as the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are concerned. We cannot logically believe in the rest of the record while refusing to believe in the account of His miracles. I do not say that no one can really believe in the rest of the record, and believe that Jesus was the Christ, while refusing to believe in the account of His miracles; because, as a matter of fact, some people do. I only say that such people are very illogical. There are a good many illogical people on earth, and some of them belong to the Christian Church. Logically, however, it is as impossible to eliminate and reject the miraculous part of the New Testament without destroying the credibility of the record as a whole as for Shylock to have taken a pound of flesh from Antonio without taking his blood and destroying his life. For if the writers of the New Testament wrote falsely or erroneously in regard to the miracles, which occupy such a considerable part of the record and are so closely interwoven with its doctrinal teachings, what guaranty have we that the rest of their statements are any more trustworthy? To say that we are warranted in rejecting the miraculous parts of the history while accepting those parts of it which involve no such element is to violate the first principles of legitimate criticism. No one would apply such a rule of interpretation to any other history or ostensible history. As well say

that in the story of Baron Munchausen we ought to accept all but the impossible portions, because all of the rest of it might easily have happened. That will not do. The incredible portions discredit what might otherwise be credible in the story, and we properly regard the whole account as fictitious. On the same principle, if the New Testament account of Christ's miracles is incredible, constituting, as it does, so large a part of the narrative, it discredits the whole of it. Writers who would either falsify or be mistaken to so great an extent would be unworthy of any confidence.

It is conceivable, of course, that any author, however honest, may make some mistakes, and that even the authors of the New Testament have made some mistakes in regard to the miracles which they attribute to Jesus, but not that they were mistaken with reference to all of them or to the majority of them. They knew whether their statements were true in the main, and, if not, nothing which they say is deserving of confidence.

But, supposing that their testimony is utterly discredited, and that no miracles were performed, what difference does it make, some people say, so far as the great doctrines of the Bible are concerned? Are not those doctrines self-evidencing, and can we not believe in them just as reasonably, regardless of the question as to whether the history is reliable or not? No; not by any means.

Undoubtedly, some of those doctrines seem to shine by their own light to a person who has been educated from his childhood to believe in them; but in the beginning they did not shine by their own light, nor do they even now to people who have not the Christian faith, nor entirely so to those who have. To a great

extent they depend for their credibility on the authority and trustworthiness of him who proclaimed them, and our confidence in them must be largely determined by what we believe in regard to him, just as our confidence in the statements of a person on the witness-stand largely depends on what we believe as to his history and character. If we have reason to believe that the witness himself is a reliable person, we accept what he says, even if we ourselves are unable to prove it; whereas, if we doubt his reliability, we doubt what he says unless we have some positive proof of it. His statements may be true in either case, but in the latter case we have not the same faith in them as if we had faith in his personal character. And, even so, if we believe that the doctrines of the New Testament were proclaimed by such a person as it represents Jesus of Nazareth to have been, our faith in them is vastly stronger than if we reject what it says in regard to His history.

Our faith in the great doctrine of God's Fatherhood, for example, is strengthened immensely if we believe that it was taught by one who was peculiarly the Son of God and who lived in such a relation to Him that He actually did what the New Testament says He did. There may be no direct connection between the doctrine and the miracles, but there is a very direct connection between faith in the doctrine and faith in the miracles: since the miracles, if genuine, while they do not prove the doctrine, do show the reliability of Him who proclaimed it,—for He surely could not have performed them unless God had been with Him.

But still the question recurs, Can we reasonably believe in them? Granting that the record of them is an integral part of the gospel story,—granting that the

early Church believed in them, and that without such a belief the Christian religion would have had no existence,—must we not, in the light of modern knowledge, refuse to believe in them and attribute the record to the ignorance of the writers and the credulity of the age in which they lived? So we are sometimes told in these days. It is said that in the time of Christ not only His disciples but people in general were exceedingly credulous, knowing nothing about the laws of nature, and that therefore they believed in miracles; whereas our knowledge of nature's laws makes it extremely unreasonable for us to believe in such violations of them. But that assertion involves two unprovable assumptions.

For, in the first place, there is no evidence that the authors of the New Testament were especially credulous, or that they lived in an especially credulous age. The advocates of that theory bring forward no proof of it. Their reasoning moves around in a very limited circle. First they tell us that people then believed in miracles because it was a credulous age, and then they tell us that the age was credulous because people then believed in miracles,—unwarrantably assuming in both of those statements that to believe in the miraculous is an evidence of credulity. Whereas, the real evidence, so far as it goes, seems to show that the first century of the Christian era was strongly inclined to skepticism. There were credulous people then as now, but there were skeptics also, and on the whole there was a prevalent disposition to disbelieve in religion. The old religions were dying, and, like Pontius Pilate, men were prone to treat the truth in a cynical way. The Sadducean spirit was abroad in the land. Moreover, it was an age of great legal ability. The Roman law

extended throughout the Roman Empire, and its officials were present in every part of it, laying down those rules of evidence which have become the foundation of our own legal system. There was no predisposition to believe in Christ's miracles without sufficient evidence, so far as any one knows. Surely, neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees were inclined to believe in them. They were determined not to believe in them, nor to let any one believe in them, if they could possibly prevent it; and they were always on hand to examine the evidence.

Consider, for example, the healing of the blind man of which we read in the ninth chapter of the Gospel of John. How thoroughly it was investigated, according to the record, first by the man's neighbours, and then by the Pharisees, who not only examined the man himself, but even sent for his parents and questioned them in regard to him, as to whether he had actually been blind from his birth! Or read the account of the raising of Lazarus, and see how impossible that credulity alone should have led so many to believe in it, especially as among them there were some who straightway told the Pharisees. Or read the account of Christ's own resurrection, and see how utterly opposed to believing in it even His disciples were until they could disbelieve no longer. Instead of being credulous, they were at first quite incredulous, regarding as an idle tale the report of the women who had been to the sepulchre; while Thomas was so skeptical that he refused even to take the word of his fellow disciples, but insisted on seeing the wounded body of Jesus and putting his finger into the print of the nails. Does that look like credulity? Or does the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, when he was engaged in destroying the dis-

ciples of Jesus, have the appearance of being due to a credulous disposition?

Oh, no; the assumption that the early Christians were a credulous people, who believed that Jesus was a miracle-worker because they desired to believe it and were easily imposed upon, cannot be maintained; there is nothing to support it.

Nor is there anything whatever to support the assumption that the miracles which Jesus is said to have wrought would have violated the laws of the natural world. The Bible nowhere says or intimates that they were in violation of nature's laws, and no one can venture to say that they were, or to deny them because he assumes that they would have been, without practically assuming that he knows all about nature, and is competent to set limits to what its laws will allow. Who is there that can properly pretend to such knowledge?

Modern science, no doubt, is a very great thing, but no man is so scientific as to understand all of the laws of nature and to know all that can be done in accordance with them. We are learning more and more about them, and the more we learn the more we can do. We are doing hundreds of things today in accordance with the laws of nature which would have been considered impossible a few years ago, and by-and-by a great many other things will be possible for us, because we shall understand those laws a great deal better than now. Indeed, what does our modern science consist in, if not in our increased and increasing ability to do with the laws and forces of nature what used to be regarded as impossibilities? And who shall place a limit to it? Who that knows anything of recent achievements with chemistry and electricity and other wonderful agencies,

—who that knows the great discovery of the correlation of forces, any force being changeable into each of the others, and the probability that all substances are but different forms or arrangements of the same original substance,—who, I say, that knows these things will venture to set a limit as to what may be done with the forces of nature in accordance with the laws of nature? When mankind shall have become perfect in their knowledge of nature and in their own spiritual qualities, what may they not do which would now be miraculous?

And if Jesus Christ was a perfect man, in His alliance with God, in His spiritual qualities, and in His knowledge of the laws of nature and His ability to use its forces, why is it not entirely credible and probable that He was able to do such works as the Bible ascribes to Him? Modern science, instead of making it less credible, increases it credibility. From that point of view, His miracles were signs of His perfect humanity; they showed that, as the Bible says, He was the head of every man, the model man, the perfect type towards which the human race is tending. It was natural for such a man to do exactly such things as the Bible ascribes to Him, for the purpose of introducing His kingdom on earth and indicating the nature of His God-given mission.

It is therefore reasonable and helpful for us to believe in the record. Some people say that they could more easily believe in Him were it not for the miracles, and they probably think so; but that is because they have not attained to the right point of view. The difficulty lies in their mistaken ideas in regard to the matter. Let them surmount that difficulty by getting the correct idea as to the nature of His miracles and the relation

which they bear to His exceptional mission, and then they will find, like a traveler who reaches the top of a mountain, that what formerly obstructed their vision now widens it and gives them a vastly more glorious outlook. Rising to a point of view where they see that the miracles which Jesus performed were not in violation of the laws of the universe, but that they showed His understanding and control of those laws, and were signs of His perfect alliance with God, they will realize his Christhood as never before, and the glory of His mission and of what it signifies for mankind. For the works that He did in His Father's name bear witness to the truth of His heavenly teachings, and, together with them, furnish ample assurance that He was verily the Son of God, the appointed Saviour of the world.

IV

THE BASIS OF OUR BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY

"If a man die, shall he live again?"—JOB 14: 14.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy, begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."—I PET. 1: 3, 4 [R. V.].

YOUNG people, as a rule, do not look far ahead. A child is interested in only the present and the immediate future. Its thoughts, like its footsteps, are short and restricted, and seldom wander far away. It thinks of a year as a long, long time, beyond which lies a hazy period with which it now has no concern. But as people become older, they look farther ahead and think more of futurity. Their thoughts run on, and on, and on, and the years seem shorter and shorter to them. They make their plans for not merely a day or a week, but for many a year in advance, and more and more feel the need of an extension of time in which to fulfil their enlarging designs; and those who feel it the most of all are those who have made the most advancement.

Said Victor Hugo, when he was near to the end of his life in this world, "For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in prose, verse, history, philosophy, drama, romance, tradition, satire, ode, song—I have tried all. But I feel that I have not said the thousandth part of what is in me. My work is only a

beginning. My work is hardly above its foundation. I would be glad to see it mounting and mounting forever. The thirst for the infinite proves infinity." And the feeling which he thus expressed has been shared by the wisest and the best in all ages, whatever their opinions as to the future have been. Even such of them as have had no belief in immortality have desired it and felt the need of it.

In the early part of his remarkable career as a scientist, Professor Huxley made light of the doctrine of immortality, as a baseless hypothesis of no practical consequence; but when he was older he said, in a letter to John Morley, "It is a curious thing that I find my dislike to the thought of extinction increasing as I get older and nearer the goal. It flashes across me at all sorts of times with a sort of horror that in 1900 I shall probably know no more of what is going on than I did in 1800. I had sooner be in hell a great deal—at any rate, in one of the upper circles, where the climate and the company are not too trying."

Herbert Spencer also, in the last volume which he published, left an exceedingly mournful and pathetic confession in regard to his agnosticism. He yearned for a life beyond the grave, although his philosophy forbade him to believe in it. "It seems a strange and repugnant conclusion," he said, "that with the cessation of consciousness at death, there ceases to be any knowledge of having existed."

Because it is a strange and repugnant conclusion, the great mass of humanity has never accepted it. Living in this world for so short a time, with the certainty of physical death always confronting them, mankind have always felt that this life is not long enough, and have asked the question—oh, how earnestly—"If a man

die, shall he live again?" And, with comparatively few exceptions, they have always answered, Yes, he shall.

In spite of all appearances and all arguments to the contrary, mankind from the beginning have believed in immortality. They have refused to believe that the death of the body involves the death of the soul and that a man finishes his whole existence at the door of the tomb. They have always believed in some sort of an after life; and the reason has been not merely that they wished to believe in it, but that they could not disbelieve in it. The belief has been intuitive, not a matter of reasoning nor a matter of evidence, with the great majority of them. Something within themselves has said, There must be, and there surely is, a continued life beyond the grave. The soul has refused to identify itself with the flesh and has intuitively asserted its continued existence, in some fashion or other, beyond death and the grave.

*"A solemn murmur of the soul
Tells of the world to be.
As travellers hear the billows roll
Before they reach the sea."*

But, nevertheless, the belief in a future life which has been held by most people has been of so vague a sort, and so mingled with fears, that they have found but little comfort in it. It has not enabled them to regard the transfer to another state of existence as otherwise than lamentable. For, while they have believed in some sort of immortality, they have generally regarded the future life as a lower state of existence, and have looked forward to it not with hope, but with dread and uncertainty. Homer makes one of his

heroes say that he would rather be a slave on earth than reign the king of all the dead; and of another, who has died, he says:

*“The soul unwilling wings her way,
(The beauteous body left a load of clay,)
Flits to the lone uncomfortable coast,
A naked, wandering, melancholy ghost.”*

Such was the prevalent belief among all of the nations before the advent of Christ, as it continues to be among those that are not Christianized.

But not so with those people who have accepted Christianity, if they have accepted it in all of its blessed significance. There are some Christians, it must be admitted, whose belief in immortality affords them but little comfort, because of the imperfection of their understanding of Christianity. They have not fully learned the truth concerning it. But to those who have learned it, the prospect of a future life is clouded with not a shadow of uncertainty or hopelessness. It is certified beyond all controversy, and is illumined with such a radiance as makes them look forward to it not with fear, but with cheerfulness. To them “Death’s truer name is Onward,” and

*“The grave itself is but a covered bridge
Leading from light to light through a brief darkness.”*

They can say, with the apostle Paul, “All things are ours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come”; and, looking forward with that assurance, they can face death and eternity with hope and good cheer.

On Easter day we celebrate our possession of that

glorious assurance. We believe in a blessed immortality, not only for ourselves but for all of the rest of mankind. We believe that just beyond the grave is a world which we call the spirit world, and that when our fleshly bodies die we enter into that spirit world, there to have what the Bible calls spiritual bodies, as much superior to these perishing bodies of flesh as the body of a winged insect is superior to that of the crawling worm with which it was formerly complicated; and that there we shall finally meet all of our loved ones, and progress with them in spiritual development and blessedness till we attain to the perfection for which God has created us.

We believe it because we believe that we are children of God, and it is absolutely inconceivable that He should have created us for only a brief term of existence. It is incredible that, having made us in His own image, with intellectual and spiritual capacities and yearnings whose fulfilment and satisfaction demand immortality, He has ordained that our existence shall come to an end when we have only just begun to develop our powers and to become what we are naturally fitted to be. There must be another life for us as children of God, in which to unfold our godlike qualities and to go on with the education and growth and development which we have barely begun on this side of the grave. Otherwise, our heavenly Father would be guilty of infanticide. He would be an unnatural, irrational Father, destroying His own offspring and violating the only good reason for bringing them into existence. That cannot be. God's Fatherhood is a guaranty of the immortality of all men; and therefore we believe in it.

We believe in it, furthermore, because we believe in

His justice, and justice demands a future life in which to correct the wrongs of this one. Tennyson says,

*“ There’s something in this world amiss
Will be unriddled by-and-by ”;*

And, oh, how many things there are that greatly need to be unriddled! How many mysteries to be explained; how much virtue that here is not fully rewarded; how much wickedness that here is not fully condemned! Good people suffer, innocent children often suffer, bad men defeat the plans of good men, and righteousness is often trampled under the feet of iniquity. If this world were all, and this life were all, justice would never be triumphant, and a large part of the human race would never get its deserts. But we believe that in the life to come both righteousness and unrighteousness will receive a just recompense, and that whatever is wrong will be overcome by the right. We believe that in that higher life the moral dissonances which occur in this state of existence will be resolved into a final and glorious harmony. We know not how, but we believe that God knows—because we believe in His wisdom, His love, and His justice.

*“ In the corrupted currents of the world
Offence’s gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft ’tis seen, the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But ’tis not so above.
There is no shuffling; there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence.”*

The secret things will be revealed; the righteousness of the righteous will shine forth as the noonday; those

who have done iniquity will be ashamed of their sinfulness; evil will be conquered and banished from the universe; and all souls will be brought into concord and blessedness. It must be so, to justify God's dealings with us.

But why do we thus believe in the justice of God, and why do we believe in His heavenly fatherhood? Why, but because of what Jesus has done for us? It is He Who has taught us to believe in God's fatherhood. It is He Who has taught us to believe in God's justice. And it is He Who has revealed to us in the most positive manner the reality of that spirit world and the certainty of that higher life into which our souls will enter when we come to the end of our earthly career.

He declared those great truths during the course of His ministry, and said that, to prove His truthfulness, He would arise from the dead. When His enemies asked Him for a sign of His authority, He said to them, "Destroy this temple"—His material body—"and in three days I will raise it up"; and again He said to them, "I lay down my life that I may take it again. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." To His disciples He said, "The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify; and the third day he shall rise again." "A little while," said He, "and ye shall not see me; and again a little while and ye shall see me." And although they wondered what He meant by it, not supposing that such a thing as His resurrection was possible, He fulfilled His prediction, and on the third day after His crucifixion reappeared in their midst in a

visible form, thereby proving beyond all question the fact of His Messiahship and the truth of His teachings

That is why we observe Easter as a jubilant festival. And the fact that it is so observed throughout the entire Christian world is one of the many infallible proofs that the Biblical story of His resurrection was not a cunningly devised fable, but the statement of a wonderfully glorious truth,—just as our annual celebration of the Fourth of July is an evidence of the adoption of our national Declaration of Independence, or as our annual decoration of soldiers' graves is one of the evidences of the great war in which they laid down their lives. Had there been no declaration of independence by the American colonies, there would be no celebration of the Fourth of July. Had there been no civil war, there would be no annual decoration of soldiers' graves in this country. Had there been no last supper of Jesus Christ and His disciples, such as the Bible describes, there would be no celebration of it by Christians of the present day. And had there been no visible resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, there would be no celebration of Easter day, nor should we observe the Christian Sabbath on the first day of the week. The early Christians changed their Sabbath from the last day to the first day, and nothing but the resurrection of Jesus Christ can account for it. Nor can anything else account for the change which took place in the feelings and the conduct of His little company of disciples within a few days of His crucifixion and burial, or for the marvelous results which they produced by their ministry. When He was arrested and crucified, they forsook Him and fled. They were utterly discouraged, and, as He had prophesied, they were "scattered, every man to his own." But, on the third

day thereafter, something suddenly delivered them from their state of dejection; something transformed them; something took away their cowardice; something overcame their selfishness; something filled their hearts with great gladness and hopefulness, and sent them forth to preach the gospel at the risk of their lives. They said that the change was caused by the resurrection of Christ and His reappearance among them in bodily form; and their conduct clearly showed that they stated the truth. They could not have been mistaken about it, nor had they any possible motive to tell a falsehood about it. The number of occasions on which He revealed Himself, and the number of persons to whom He revealed Himself, together with His words and actions during the forty days before His final departure from them, precluded any possibility of hallucination or deception in regard to the matter, and furnished a chain of "infallible proofs" that He had kept His promise to come back in bodily form from the grave.

Otherwise, as soon as His disciples began to preach that He had arisen from the grave and had reappeared in their midst, His enemies would have disproved it by disinterring His body and re-nailing it to the cross. Their report that the disciples had stolen it was too absurd to deserve a moment's credence from any one.

No, it was not as a set of grave-robbers, nor as a set of self-deceived believers in a cunningly devised fable, that the early disciples went forth at the risk of their lives to preach the gospel of Christ. It was because God had begotten them again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It was because they knew Him and the power of His resur-

rection, and were inspired by that knowledge to carry out His commands.

God grant that we also may have that knowledge, and may be inspired thereby to walk in newness of life. So shall we be "strengthened with might in the inner man" to meet our trials triumphantly, and to do our duty with cheerfulness as the years pass away;

*"Thus ever towards man's height of nobleness
Striving, some new progression to contrive;
Till, just as any other friend's, we press
Death's hand; and, having died, feel none the less
How beautiful it is to be alive."*

V

WILL CHRIST RETURN TO THIS WORLD?

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his work. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."—MATT. 16: 24, 27, 28.

NO one can carefully read the New Testament without seeing that it often mentions a coming of Christ in addition to that which took place at His birth—a different sort of coming, which had not occurred when any part of the New Testament was written. That coming was repeatedly foretold by Himself; and it is very evident from their own statements that, after His death and resurrection, His disciples expected it. Indeed, hardly any subject is more frequently mentioned by them; and it is said that, either directly or indirectly, one verse in twenty-five of the whole New Testament refers to it. I have never verified that statement; but certain it is that the New Testament frequently mentions not only the original coming of Christ but also the coming to which He referred in the words of my text.

In regard to His original coming there is very general agreement among the churches of Christendom. All Christians agree that, at the time of His birth, Jesus came in the flesh, in a visible, personal, human form.

There is no such unanimity of opinion, however, in

regard to the coming which is mentioned in my text. Christian people disagree as to the time and the manner of it. The most of them believe that it has not yet occurred, and that it will be a personal and visible return to this world. They believe that Jesus is coming back in a bodily form to set up His judgment throne on earth, for the purpose of punishing His enemies and rewarding His followers and establishing an order of things that will not pass away. Those who hold to that belief, however, do not agree as to the time when the event will occur. They are divided into two parties with reference to it, one of which is known as the pre-millennial and the other as the post-millennial. The pre-millennialists believe that Christ's coming is to precede a millennial period—a period of a thousand years,—during which He will personally reign on the earth,—and that it is likely to occur at any moment without any further warning of it. Whereas the post-millennialists believe that He is not to appear until after the millennium, which they think to be still in the far distant future. Both parties alike give a literal interpretation to what the Bible says about the manner of His coming and believe that it will be accompanied by a bodily resurrection and a final decisive judgment of all who have died; that the present heavens and earth will be utterly destroyed; and that a new universe will be created, in which a part of the human race, having been judged and approved, will be rewarded with everlasting happiness in heaven, while all of the others, having been judged and condemned, will be punished with everlasting torment in hell.

But while such is the belief of a large number of people, there is a growing number who maintain that the coming which Christ foretold has already occurred,

and that, instead of being a personal, bodily coming, it was a spiritual coming—a coming of His spiritual authority and influence into such a degree of acceptance among men as to make Him actually their spiritual Ruler or King. They maintain that, as He Himself said, it was His “coming in his Kingdom,” which was practically the same thing as the coming of His Kingdom, and that His promise that it should take place within that generation was fulfilled at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, in the year 70 of our era, when the Kingdom was taken away from the people of Israel and given to the Christian Church, which then came into power as the chief exponent and representative of God’s truth in this world.

If you turn to the first verse of the ninth chapter of Mark, which is the parallel passage to that which I have taken as a text, you will notice that it reads in this way: “Verily I say unto you, There be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power.” Matthew says, “Shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.” Evidently, according to these two statements, the coming of Christ in His Kingdom means exactly the same as the coming of God’s Kingdom. The expressions are mutually convertible, which shows that Christ’s coming does not mean necessarily His visible, bodily, personal coming.

Not only when He uttered the words of my text, but on several other occasions, He said that His coming was to occur during that generation. He never even intimated that it was to be postponed for many centuries, nor did He ever speak of it as a bodily return to this world. He never called it a return, or a second

coming, or a second advent, or a coming back, or a coming again. He called it His coming in His Kingdom, in power and glory. The only instance in which He said that He was coming again was when He promised His disciples that after His crucifixion He would come back from the grave. That referred to His resurrection, not to His coming in His Kingdom. Of the latter He said to His disciples on a certain occasion, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come" [Matt. 10:23]. And when they said to Him, with reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, "Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?" [see the marginal rendering], His answer was, "Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all of these things be fulfilled"; and, after telling them of certain signs by which they might know when His coming was near, among which was the encompassing of Jerusalem by its enemies, He exhorted them to watch for it, lest they should be unprepared [Matt. 24; Luke 25]. He would certainly not have told them to watch for an event which was not to take place till long after their death.

After His resurrection, when He was questioned by Simon Peter as to what the apostle John should do, His answer was, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" the implication plainly being that John was one of those of whom He had previously said that they should not taste of death until after His coming; and, as a matter of fact, John lived till long after the destruction of Jerusalem. Shortly before that catastrophe, while he was living as an exile on the island of

Patmos, he was told no less than five times that Christ was about to come quickly, and that the time was at hand [Rev. 3: 11; 22: 7, 10, 12, 20].

In the face of such statements by the Saviour Himself, how can any one suppose that when He spoke of His coming He referred to something which was not to happen for thousands of years?

Or how can any one read the book of Acts, and the epistles of Paul and Peter and James and John, without seeing that all of the early disciples fully expected that Christ would come, in accordance with His promise, before the termination of that generation? They watched for His coming, as He had instructed them, and expected it from day to day.

“The time is short,” said St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians [I Cor. 7: 29]. To the Philippians he wrote, “The Lord is at hand” [Phil. 4: 5]; and to the Thessalonians, “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep” [I Thess. 4: 15]. “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh,” said St. James; and, again, “Behold, the Judge standeth before the door” [Jas. 5: 8, 9]. St. Peter, in his first epistle, declared that the end of all things was at hand [I Pet. 4: 7]. And St. John, in his first epistle, said “Little children, it is the last time [I John 2: 18]. Because they believed that the coming of the Lord was so nigh, the apostles exhorted their fellow Christians to be sober, and watchful, and patient, and cheerful, dismissing all anxiety about worldly affairs. Paul even advised unmarried people to remain unmarried on that account. He argued that it was best for them not to involve themselves in domestic responsibilities, because

everything was to be so soon and so thoroughly changed [I Cor. 7].

Were they wrong in assuming that the promised coming of Christ was so soon to occur? How could they have failed to think so in view of what He Himself had said to them? He had left them no option in regard to that matter. If they believed His explicit statements as to the time of His coming, they could not do otherwise than to expect it to occur in their lifetime.

And, in truth, it actually did take place before that generation had come to an end. Jesus came in His Kingdom when Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Mosaic dispensation was brought to an end, and the Christian dispensation took its place in the world. He came at that time, not in bodily form, but in spiritual power, into a position of increasing influence, by virtue of which He is now acknowledged as the Messiah by a large part of the world. When He predicted His coming in power and glory as the ruler of a Messianic Kingdom, He was comparatively unknown, and but few people believed in Him. He was poor and despised and about to be crucified, and to those who rejected Him His prophecy must have seemed like the talk of a crazy man. But history has justified it. His Kingdom has come, and He has come in His Kingdom, which is already far greater than that of King Solomon or of any of the Roman Emperors. You and I, as Christian believers, are among the trophies of His coming, helping millions of others to form the unparalleled triumphal procession which accompanies His progress to greater victories still.

Such is the only interpretation of His coming which corresponds with the facts of history and with His own language concerning it.

But when these statements are advanced, they are met with the statement that His coming was so described as to disprove the supposition that it has already occurred. For it is said that He promised to come not only in power and glory, but in the clouds of heaven, accompanied by angels; and that He declared that before His coming the sun should be darkened, and the moon should not give its light, and the stars should fall from the sky. And, furthermore, it is said that, at the time of His ascension, an angel told His disciples that He would come again in like manner as they had seen Him depart from them; and that Paul told the Thessalonians that the dead in Christ should rise first, and that those who remained alive would be caught up together with them to meet Him in the clouds; and that Peter said that in the day of the Lord the heavens would pass away with a great noise, and that the earth and its contents would be burned up.

It is true that the Bible contains such statements. And, therefore, notwithstanding what it says as to the time of His coming, many people contend that He has not yet come as He promised to, and are still expecting Him to come in that particular way.

How shall we explain the apparent contradiction between what the Bible says as to the time of His coming and the manner of His coming and the fact that He has not come in that particular way?

The only way of explaining it is by assuming one of two things: either that Jesus was mistaken as to the time of His coming, or that the disciples were mistaken as to the manner of His coming. The first is incredible. Jesus could not possibly have made such a mistake. But the disciples might easily have mistaken His meaning; and they evidently did so—not as to the time,

but as to the manner of His coming. Nor was that the only thing, by any means, concerning which they mistook His meaning. He often had occasion to correct their mistakes and to speak of their slowness to understand what He said.

When He warned them against the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they took His language literally and supposed that He was speaking about loaves of bread. When He said to them, after His conversation with the Samaritan woman, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," they again supposed that he was speaking of material food. When He said to them, on the eve of His crucifixion, "Whither I go, ye cannot come," and "A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me," they were mystified and wondered what He was talking about, although He had repeatedly told them of His approaching death and resurrection. And when, after His resurrection, He conversed with two of them whom he accompanied as they went to Emmaus, they showed such dullness of comprehension that it impelled Him to say to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?"

What wonder, then, that they failed to understand Him as to the manner of His coming, especially as what He said about it was principally quoted from the Old Testament prophecies. He applied those ancient prophecies to His own spiritual coming as He applied a prophetic assertion of Malachi to the preliminary coming of John the Baptist; and His language was not meant to be taken literally in either case.

The Jewish people expected that before the coming

of the Messiah the prophet Elijah would return to this world, and Jesus told them that Elijah had already arrived, meaning that John the Baptist had shown the spirit of Elijah and had spiritually fulfilled the expectation concerning him. And so when He said that at the time of His coming the sun should be darkened and the moon should not give its light, and the stars should fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens should be shaken, He was using figurative language taken from the prophecy of Joel, who applied it to a national calamity which occurred in His own time [Joel 2: 10, 11, 30, 31]. Jesus used it with reference to the greater calamity which occurred at the time when Jerusalem was destroyed, as He had distinctly foretold. Thousands upon thousands of the Jewish people were killed, and the rest of them were carried into foreign captivity, and the Judaic dispensation was brought to an end. To the Jewish nation, figuratively speaking, the sun was then darkened, the stars did then fall, and the heavens were then shaken. Indeed, its sun is still darkened, its star has not yet risen again, and its heavens have not yet ceased to tremble. As Jesus had predicted, the Jewish nation was then cast into outer darkness, which has not yet fully passed away.

As for the statement of the angel on the day of His ascension, that He would come in like manner as the disciples had seen Him depart from them, the Greek expression which our translators have rendered "in like manner as" would have been better rendered by the single word "as." It is really so rendered in the saying of Jesus, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye

would not" [Luke 13:34]. He evidently did not mean that He would have gathered the people of Jerusalem together in precisely the same manner as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings; nor need we suppose that the angel meant that He would return to this world in precisely the same manner in which He departed from it. The angel's language had presumably no different meaning from that of Jesus Himself when He told His disciples that, before the termination of that generation, they should "see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" [Luke 21:27, 32].

The disciples were not mistaken as to the time of His coming; and their mistake as to the manner of it may have been providential. That was the opinion of the Rev. Frederick W. Robertson, the distinguished English clergyman, than whom there have been but few, if any, more competent interpreters of Biblical history. Said he, "The apostles lived in anticipation of an immediate end of the world, no doubt; but I cannot see that this, on the whole, was anything but good. It was this which drew the Christians so closely together—made their union so remarkable, and startled the world, to which, otherwise, the new religion would have appeared merely a Philosophy, and not a Life. Besides, are we sure that aught less strong than this hope could have detached men so instantly and entirely from the habits of long sin; or that, on natural principles and without a miracle, even the apostles could have been induced to crowd so much superhuman energy into so small a compass?"

However that may be, Jesus has come as He said he would. He has come in power and glory. He has come in His Kingdom. And never before was His

Kingdom extending so rapidly, or His power and glory being so conspicuously displayed, as at this very day. During the last century more people have been converted to the Christian religion than were converted during the first ten centuries. At the end of the first century, there were about 500,000 Christians; at the end of the second century, about 2,000,000; at the end of the tenth century, about 50,000,000; at the end of the eighteenth century, about 200,000,000; and at the end of the nineteenth century, about 400,000,000.

Ah, yes, "our eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," and the next generation will behold even more of it. For Christ is in the world today, judging it and steadily extending His sway. There is no need of His coming back to it in a bodily form, and there is no likelihood of His doing so. His spiritual presence and influence are sufficient for His purpose; and our privilege, as well as our duty, is to co-operate with Him in extending His Kingdom, so as to hasten the time when in His name every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess His Lordship, to the glory of God.

VI

THE TRIUMPHAL PROGRESS OF CHRIST

“And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.

“And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without, in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded them, and they let them go.

“And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him.

“And many spread their garments in the way; and others cut down branches off the trees, and strewed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—MARK II: 1-9.

IN order to understand the full significance of this incident, we must turn to the Old Testament, where, in the ninth and tenth verses of the ninth chapter of Zechariah, we find the following language: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off; and

he shall speak peace unto the nations ; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

That prophecy was written about five hundred years before Jesus was born, at a time when the Israelites had no king of their own, but were subject to the King of Babylon. They had only recently returned from their Babylonian captivity, and were living in an oppressed and impoverished condition, surrounded by powerful nations that constantly threatened them. But the prophet, with inspired vision, looking down the course of time, beheld the coming of a person who should be not only the King of Israel but the rightful ruler of the world. He beheld Him riding onward to universal dominion, not, like other kings, on a caparisoned war-horse, but seated on an ass's colt, in token of His peaceful character and the quietness and blessedness which would attend on His reign.

For some hundreds of years that prediction had been regarded by the people of Israel as having a distinctly Messianic significance. It was one of the principal passages on which they based their expectation that a Messiah would come.

So, when Jesus was ready to declare His Messiahship and to have the whole nation understand what He claimed, He very naturally took the method which is described in my text. He could not possibly have taken a more significant means.

Until then He had not publicly declared His Messiahship, lest He should precipitate a crisis before the right time. He had been traveling about through Judea and Galilee, preaching the gospel and doing such wonderful works that many people were thinking that He

might be the Messiah; but He had refrained from explicitly claiming to be.

At last, however, the time had come for Him to declare Himself openly; and for that purpose He went up to Jerusalem with His disciples, when, owing to the celebration of the feast of the passover, the city was thronged with pilgrims from all over the world. Having increased the popular excitement by raising Lazarus from the grave, He entered the city in the manner which is described in my text, amid the acclamations of a jubilant multitude who, immediately perceiving the significance of His action, saluted Him with hosannas as the long-expected Messiah, using a pertinent quotation from one of the psalms.

In so doing they were justified, although they mistook the true nature of His Messiahship and of the Kingdom which He was about to establish on earth. For He was really the Messiah. He claimed nothing less; and during the last nineteen centuries history has been proving the truth of His claim. For a few days it was seemingly falsified by His arrest and crucifixion, and the hopes of His disciples were dashed to the ground. But He had foreseen all of that, and had foretold it to His disciples, and had also told them that it was necessary for the success of His mission. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit," said He; and even so it has proved. Ever since His crucifixion He has been gaining new followers, and extending His dominion, and giving an increase of blessedness wherever His gospel has been preached among men. The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. Cæsar has passed away; the Roman Empire has passed away; the Roman

religion has passed away; the gods of the Pantheon are worshiped no more; but the dominion of Jesus has not passed away. "With his pierced hands he has lifted empires off their hinges, turned the stream of history from its channels, and still governs the ages." His divine right to rule has been fully established; and, year after year, He who rode into the city of Jerusalem, seated on an ass's colt in fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, is riding steadily onward to the universal dominion which that prophecy indicates. Never have any doubt of it.

And never overlook the fact that, as He said to Pontius Pilate, His Kingdom is not of this world. It is in the world and will finally include the world, but it is not of the world as to its origin or its character. Heavenly in its origin, it is spiritual in character and uses only spiritual and heavenly means. It cannot consistently do otherwise. The Jewish people perversely lost sight of that fact, notwithstanding what their prophets had said in regard to it. They desired and expected a temporal King; and, if Jesus would have permitted them, they would have enthroned Him as such. On one occasion, when He had miraculously fed a great multitude, they endeavoured to force such a Kingship upon Him; and when He entered Jerusalem, seated on an ass's colt, if He would have exchanged the colt for a war-horse, He could not only have avoided the impending crucifixion, but could have put Himself immediately at the head of an army and have been accepted by the nation as its liberator and King. But He could not have done so without being false to His mission.

We are told that, after His resurrection, while He was walking to Emmaus with two of His disciples, He

expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself, and showed them therefrom that it was necessary that He should suffer at the hands of His enemies in order to conquer and govern the world. For the weapons of His warfare were not carnal but spiritual. The methods by which He was to gain His victories were not belligerent but peaceful. And not until those methods are everywhere adopted, superseding the old methods of vindictiveness and bloodshed, and

*“Each man finds his own in all men’s good,
And all men work in noble brotherhood,”*

will His Kingdom be completed and His mission fulfilled.

God hasten the day. Alas, it is still afar off. “We see not yet all things put under him”; and we shall not see them put under Him until we and all other men have become His disciples not only in name but in deed and in truth. For “while Christ alone can save the world, Christ cannot save the world alone.” He needs followers and helpers, and not merely such as bestrewed His pathway and saluted Him with hosannas when He rode into Jerusalem, but such as believe in Him sufficiently to obey Him in everything and, if need be, to die for Him.

There is somewhere a picture of a roadway in India, across which there are lying, side by side, and close together, a large number of people, while a man who is on horseback rides deliberately over them, his horse necessarily stepping on some of them. They represent a religious sect among the people of India, and the whole picture represents a religious ceremony in which

the people of that sect participate, supposing that by thus making a living roadway for the progress of their great high priest they are performing a highly meritorious action, and that if any of them is seriously injured by it he will be rewarded with everlasting blessedness. We call that ceremony a superstition, and are justified in doing so; but, nevertheless, it suggests a great truth—that the best roadway for the progress of any spiritual ruler, as he goes forth on a mission of truth and salvation, is constituted of human beings who are devoted both to him and to the cause which he serves.

Is not that the only kind of a roadway by which Jesus can advance to His prophesied victory? How can He obtain world-wide dominion—how can He make an end of sin and bring in universal righteousness—unless we thus become, as it were, His stepping stones? How else shall He finally subdue all things to Himself, and through Himself to the Father, that God may at last be all in all? Other way there is none; and if we wish Him to be triumphant, we should assist Him by thus devoting ourselves to His service, remembering His significant saying, that whosoever will lose his life for His sake shall find it unto life eternal.

One way of assisting Him is by giving verbal testimony to our faith in His Messiahship, acknowledging Him openly as our Saviour and Lord—emulating the disciples who hailed Him with hosannas on the occasion to which my text refers. That is the least that we can do, and we ought not to refrain from it. No devotion to Him is sufficiently shown without utterance. “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,” and let those who believe in Jesus say so. Let them confess Him before their fellowmen—not vaingloriously, not sancti-

moniously, nor hypocritically, nor time-servingly, but humbly, gladly, and honestly. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." It strengthens the faith of those who make it, and tends to beget faith in other people. It gratifies the Saviour's heart, and helps to prepare His way before Him.

But words alone will not suffice. We must not only call Him Lord and Master, but put His precepts into practice, presenting ourselves as living sacrifices for the success of His cause.

O, how the early martyrs bestrewed His pathway when they went forth, for His sake, to the rack, and the stake, and the sword, and the dungeon, and suffered agonizing deaths, without wavering for an instant in their steadfast devotion, but dying triumphantly with His name on their lips! Every drop of blood which they uncomplainingly shed for him, and every pain which they bore for Him, gave witness to His saving power and helped to prepare the way for His universal dominion. And equally so, at the present time, whosoever willingly bears a cross for Him or endures persecution for the sake of His word, or endeavours to live in all respects in accordance with His teachings, is helping to make a highway for Him, whereon He may ride to His ultimate victory.

It costs something, undoubtedly, to live such a life as His service demands. But alas for him who ungratefully and selfishly refuses! For, oh, how little we can do for Him in comparison with what He has done for us! How little we can give to Him in comparison with what He has given to us!

Some years before our civil war, a coloured man who had been a slave on a southern plantation was liberated

by his master, who thenceforth paid him for his services. As time went on, he saved his earnings; but his employer, after some years, met with financial misfortune and was obliged to sell all of his property at auction. When the coloured man heard that the sale was advertised, he went to his former master with the money which he had saved and requested him to count it.

“Jerry,” said the gentleman, when he had counted the money, “you’ve got two hundred and fifty dollars.”

“Marse Jeems,” said the coloured man, “who I b’long to ’fore I’s free?”

“You belonged to me, Jerry,” was the answer.

“Marse Jeems, who sot me free?” said Jerry.

“Why, I did,” said the gentleman.

Whereupon the faithful servant said, “Marse Jeems, all I is, and all I has, is yourn. Take de money, an sabe de ole house.”

The white man would not take the money, but he accepted the devotion which prompted the offer of it; and, oh, how gratifying the offer must have been to his soul!

But how much reason had that poor freedman for being devoted to the gentleman who had given him his freedom in comparison with what we have for being devoted to Christ? What should we be, were it not for Him? Who has given us the intellectual and spiritual liberty in which we rejoice every day of our lives? Why are we not in the same condition as those millions of people who are still under bondage to gross superstitions, not knowing that God is their heavenly Father, and living in spiritual darkness all the days of their lives? Our freedom is owing to what Jesus has done for us. He is our redeemer and our spiritual

King. Ought we not, then, gladly to do what we can for Him? Shall we not gratefully and lovingly say to Him, Take all that we have, and all that we are; take us and use us in the interests of Thy Kingdom, that Thy way may be known upon the earth, Thy saving health among all nations?

VII

THE EXTERMINATION OF EVIL

“Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.”—MATT. 15: 13.

UNDER the earth's surface, so richly diversified, there is a rocky formation composed of various strata; and while the most of that formation is hidden from view, some of it comes to the surface in numerous places and occasionally rises to a mountainous altitude. Such outcroppings may apparently have no connection; but they are united underground as components of a system that encircles the world.

Somewhat similarly the various parts of the Bible are united by the great underlying truths which belong to its structure. Often coming to view, they are occasionally manifested with a grandeur of expression which is nowhere else equalled in the literature of mankind.

One of those expressions occurs in my text. Apparently standing by itself, it is connected as to its significance with numerous similar expressions which belong to the same great vein of truth, extending through the Bible from beginning to end. In fact, it is an expression of the everlasting principle which constitutes the very substratum of the Bible—viz., the sovereignty of God, and the certainty that His will shall prevail universally. That principle is the bed-rock of

both the Old and the New Testament; it underlies both the Judaic and the Christian religion.

The first indication of it is in the third chapter of Genesis, where there is a prophecy of enmity between mankind and the serpent, and of the coming of a time when the serpent's head shall be bruised—which means nothing less than the destruction of evil so far as its relation to mankind is concerned.

Further along, in the book of Daniel, there is a prophecy which is set forth under the figure of a vision—the vision of a stone which was cut out without hands, and which smote a great image till it ground it into powder which the wind drove away; after which the stone grew till it became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. The interpretation of that vision was that God was about to establish a kingdom which, notwithstanding its apparently feeble beginning, would overcome all opposition and finally be dominant throughout the whole world.

When Jesus began His ministry, He taught His disciples to pray “Thy Kingdom come”—the Kingdom which was foretold in the teachings of the prophets, the Kingdom which is opposed to all of the forces of unrighteousness, and of whose final complete triumph St. John had a vision when he saw, as it were, a door opened in heaven and beheld the whole creation joyfully worshiping God. That is what we really pray for, if we use the words with their full significance, when we say “Thy Kingdom come.” We pray for the utter destruction of evil. We pray that whatever is opposed to God's Kingdom may be expelled from the universe, as the dust into which the great image was powdered was driven away by the wind, and that its place may be taken by that heavenly Kingdom which is

“righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” And my text is a declaration by the Saviour Himself that what we thus pray for shall sometime be realized. In figurative language, like that of the prophets, he foretold the extinction of whatsoever is not in accord with God’s will.

The statement was called forth by the enmity of the Pharisees, who complained that His disciples ate bread without washing their hands, and that by so doing they transgressed the traditions of the elders. In answer to their criticism, He charged them with transgressing the commandments of God, and with making His word of no effect by their unreasonable traditions. And it was with particular reference to those foolish traditions that He uttered the great truth which is set forth in my text. He plainly implied that Pharisaism is doomed to extinction, because it is not in accord with God’s will. But He did not limit the application of His words to that matter. On the contrary, He made the statement so broad and so sweeping that it applies to everything which conflicts with the purpose of God. Pharisaism was only one of a great many such things, all of which must be destroyed for exactly the same reason. All doctrines and traditions and customs and institutions which are not divinely ordained must pass out of existence, that God’s will may be done in all parts of the universe as it is now being done by the angels on high.

That is why Jesus came into this world. That is what he lived and died for—to exterminate evil in all of its phases. “For this purpose,” says the Scripture, “the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil”; and again, “Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and

blood, he also likewise partook of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Not only the works of the devil, but the very principle of evil which is personified under the name of the devil, and from which all actual evil comes, will be abolished when the mission of Christ is fulfilled.

In accordance with that divine purpose and plan, many things which once flourished have already been uprooted and brought to an end. They have passed out of existence, no more to return. Where now are the false religions which flourished among the Gentiles before the advent of Christ? Where is the ancient Egyptian religion, with its esoteric mysteries and its worship of beasts? Where is the ancient Phenician religion, with its horrible worship of Moloch? Where is the ancient religion of the Greeks and the Romans, with its worship of the mythical gods of Olympus and its licentious rites and ceremonies? Where is the worship of Diana of Ephesus? Where is the ancient Druidical religion, or that of the old Germanic and Scandinavian nations? Gone forever, uprooted and exterminated, because they were not of God's planting and were not in agreement with the truth of His word.

Gone also are many of the horrible customs which prevailed in connection with those by-gone religions. Gone are the gladiatorial shows, in which multitudes of human beings were forced to slaughter one another for the amusement of the Roman populace. Gone is the ancient custom of sacking cities in warfare, and of massacring their inhabitants. Gone is the practice of carrying prisoners of war into slavery. Gone is the terrible custom of burying people alive, either as a punishment for their offences or as a sacrifice to the

gods. Gone is the utterly selfish custom of abandoning unwelcome children, to die of starvation or to be devoured by beasts. Uprooted and exterminated are all of those evils. And with them have gone most of the nations that practiced them. Every one of the kingdoms which were represented by the different parts of the image which is mentioned in the book of Daniel has long since disappeared from the face of the earth. The Roman Empire itself, which once appeared to be impregnable, is a thing of the past; and where Nero's golden house once stood the antiquarian now searches for some remains of its grandeur.

For the same reason, many things of more recent origin have also been exterminated. The Inquisition has gone; the feudal system has gone; slavery has gone in every civilized country; and the principles of true democracy, based on the fact of human brotherhood, are gaining acceptance throughout the whole world.

Many great evils and innumerable lesser ones still remain, sad to say; but, one and all, they must go, like those which have already passed out of existence. Like the ancient religions which opposed Christianity, so must vanish all false theologies and false systems of philosophy in regard to God and mankind. Like the oppressive traditions of the Scribes and the Pharisees, so must disappear all bigotry in regard to religious ideas and observances. As slavery has been abolished, so must it be with the traffic in intoxicants, and with what is called the social evil, and with the practice of granting improper divorces, and with the cruelty of obliging little children to labour at tasks which interfere with their normal development, and with the tyranny and injustice of great corporations, and with the selfish struggle for supremacy between employers

and employees, and with all narrow-minded partisanship and corruption in politics, and with all jealousies and intrigues and warfare between nations. Those things are decidedly not of God's planting, and they must all pass away. Their days are surely numbered, and God knows when every one of them will come to an end.

*"Creeds, empires, systems, rot with age,
But the great people's ever youthful!
And it shall write the future page
To our humanity more truthful."*

*"The world shall not forever bow
To things which mock God's own endeavour.
'Tis nearer than they wot of now,
When flowers shall wreath the sword forever!
'Tis coming! Yes, 'tis coming!"*

And, finally, sin itself will cease. Sin, the cause of all other evils, the root from which they all proceed, will be uprooted and destroyed. The doctrine of everlasting sin is directly opposed to the truth of my text. It can be logically defended only by assuming that sin is something which our heavenly Father has planted and which He intends to perpetuate. But who can rationally make such a monstrous assumption?

No, sin is not something which our heavenly Father has planted. It is something which He abominates. It is a poisonous and detestable weed in His garden, and it is to be destroyed, root and branch, wheresoever it grows. For the power that makes for righteousness is not confined to this world, and its operations are not confined to this side of the grave.

The belief of some people, that, instead of being exterminated, sin is finally to be confined to one part

of the universe, segregated forever in a place which is called hell, does not agree with God's word, nor does it consist with the perfection of His heavenly government. That unreasonable belief is itself one of the things to be rooted up and destroyed. Already it is showing symptoms of passing away. Less and less it is being believed by mankind, and more and more rapidly it is being superseded by a blessed faith in the final salvation of all.

But what then? If the doctrine of endless sin is not a thing of God's planting, and is to be rooted out of the minds of mankind, shall we continue in sin while we live in this world, and leave its final extinction to the power of God? If all evil is to be destroyed, have we nothing to do but to wait for God to destroy it?

To adopt that conclusion is to show a sad lack of correct understanding. Not so did St. Paul. On the contrary, in the fifteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, after setting forth the final destruction of evil and the ultimate harmony of all things with God, he concluded by saying, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." That is good reasoning, especially when we bear in mind that, as the same apostle elsewhere says, God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, and that, in order to be saved, we must work out our salvation in accordance with His all-wise and unchangeable plan. We should remember that, in carrying out His purposes in regard to mankind, God makes use of human agencies. He works with us, and we must therefore work with Him, to bring the desired end to pass. He alone will never abolish the evils which exist among men. But, just as

He has already destroyed many evils by means of the human agencies which history mentions, He will finally destroy all others; and the sooner and the more earnestly we co-operate with Him, the sooner they will be destroyed.

In the glorious truth which my text sets forth there is a powerful incentive for us, not to be idle or careless or sinful, but to be active and hopeful in the work of uprooting all things that are evil. If God had ordained that they should not be uprooted, it would be utterly useless for us to try to get rid of them. But now we have no possible excuse for not trying. For we know that they ought to be uprooted, that God wishes them to be uprooted, that they can be uprooted, and that the only way of doing it is by means of our own efforts, inspired and assisted and made successful by Him.

Until comparatively recent times, certain diseases were regarded as visitations of God. They were attributed to His wrath or to His inscrutable purposes, and no intelligent effort was made to get rid of them. But we now understand that they are caused by our violation of certain physical laws, and that in order to get rid of them it is only necessary for us to conform to those laws. And so we have already nearly exterminated some of them, which formerly swept away many thousands of people; and there is reason to hope that before long we shall get rid of some more of them. We can finally get rid of all of them by unitedly working with God to that end. And in the same spirit we should work against all sorts of evil, never resting from opposing them till they are wholly destroyed. To compromise with them, to make any sort of terms with them which will permit their continuance, is to

fall short of our duty as children of God. Such things should be exterminated, and it is both our duty and our privilege to be God's fellow-labourers in bringing about their extinction at the earliest possible day.

No other religion is so well fitted to inspire people for such a conflict with evil as that which includes a belief in universal salvation. If Universalists are not in the forefront of that conflict, it is not because of their faith, but because they are not living up to it.

Thank God for a religion so comforting and inspiring! Thank God for its splendid optimism! Blessed be His name for the assurance which He has given us that every plant which He hath not planted shall be rooted up and destroyed. In that assurance let us labour, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and looking steadfastly forward to the grand consummation when all souls shall be in harmony with Him who created them.

*"And angelic hosts shall cry,
Holy, holy Lord, Most High,
Thou art All in All."*

VIII

THE STORY OF JONAH

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee."—JONAH 3: 1, 2.

IN the ninth chapter of the book of Judges it is said that, on a certain occasion, the trees went forth to choose a king, and that, after the olive tree and the fig tree and the vine had declined, the bramble accepted the position and issued its edicts accordingly. The story is related as if it were true. It is not said to be an allegory, a myth, or a parable. But every one who reads it understands that it is a parable, because of the internal evidence, and because a literal interpretation of it would reduce it to absurdity.

Strangely enough, however, many people who are intelligent in regard to most matters, and who understand that the story of the trees is a parable, do not perceive that the story of Jonah is an allegory. They assume that, because it is related as if it were true, it was intended by its author to be so understood, notwithstanding the absurdities which are involved in that theory. Taken in that way, the story is a serious obstacle to the faith of some people, while it signally serves the purpose of those who scoff at the Bible. Whereas, if it be taken as its author intended, it is full of literary beauty and religious instructiveness.

Those people who contend that it is literally true base their argument, to a great extent, on Christ's

statement to the Pharisees, that no sign should be given to that generation excepting the sign of the prophet Jonah. According to Luke's account, He said, "For even as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation. . . . The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here" [Luke 11:29-32]. According to the commonly accepted version of Matthew's account, He also said, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" [Matt. 12:40]. That statement is not contained in Luke's account of the incident, and there is reason for believing that it was not originally in Matthew's account, but that it first appeared in the margin as an editorial comment, and was afterwards incorporated with the text by some mistaken transcriber. For, as a matter of fact, Jesus was not three days and three nights in the heart of the earth—that is, in the sepulchre,—but only two nights and a part of three days—from Friday evening till Sunday morning, according to our terminology. He arose on the third day from the time of His crucifixion, according to the Jewish method of reckoning; but there were not really three days and three nights in the interim; and it is not at all likely that He made such a statement. Luke's account of His reference to the story of Jonah, containing no mention of such an interment, is entirely accurate, in all probability; and if so, He meant that His preaching should be a warning to that wicked generation, as Jonah's preaching was intended for a warning to the Ninevites.

But, in either case, it by no means follows that the story was literally true, or that He believed it to be so. Knowing it to be an allegory, He could use it for illustration as conscientiously and as effectively as if it were strictly historical, especially if He knew that its allegorical character was familiar to His hearers also.

If a modern preacher, to illustrate a point in his sermon, should refer to some familiar incident in the story of the Pilgrim's Progress, even though he should refer to it as if it were true, none of his hearers would suppose that he believed it to be so. If he should say, for example, that as Christian and Hopeful escaped from the dungeon of Giant Despair by means of the key which Christian found in his bosom, so we may always escape from our moods of despondency by means of our faith in the teachings of Christ, no one would suppose that he was committing himself to a belief in the literal accuracy of John Bunyan's famous allegory. And, similarly, no one should assume that Jesus Christ believed the story of Jonah to be historically true, merely because He used it for an illustrative purpose in connection with an important truth which He desired to emphasize. His hearers doubtless understood that He was using it in that way—just as He used the Roman and Grecian mythology with reference to Hades and Elysium and Tartarus in His wonderfully appropriate parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

But if the story is an allegory, what did its author intend to teach by it? What verities were represented by it?

Jonah was used as a representative of the whole Hebrew nation, with special reference to its prophetic character and its missionary calling. The entire nation was thus personified, as it was sometimes called Israel,

or Jacob, or Jeshurum. Why the name of the prophet Jonah was so used in this story is now a matter of uncertainty. There was perhaps some local reason for it, well known at the time when the story was written—as, owing to something that George Washington said, the name of Jonathan Trumbull, who was the governor of Connecticut during our Revolutionary War, became so representative of this country's democracy that our nation even now is occasionally called "Brother Jonathan"; and as, owing to something that was once published by a popular satirist, the English nation is often mentioned even now as "John Bull."

The great city of Nineveh was used as a representative of the whole Gentile world, whose recognized metropolis it was at that time; and the statement that Jonah was commanded to go there as a preacher represented the fact that the Hebrew nation was under a sacred obligation to be a missionary nation, having been created not merely for its own sake, but for the sake of humanity, that in Abraham and his seed, as the book of Genesis says, all families of the earth might have a blessing. "Thus saith the Lord God," said Isaiah to Israel, "I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."

But the nation which was thus chosen to be a light to the Gentiles persistently refused to respond to the call. It was not willing to be used as a missionary nation, to carry the knowledge of God and His truth to the world. It took no interest in the enlightenment and salvation of the Gentiles, but rather held itself aloof from them,

declining to have any intercourse with them excepting in commercial matters. It was willing to trade with them, with a view to its own benefit, but not to do anything for their spiritual welfare—which is set forth in the allegory by the statement that Jonah, instead of going to Nineveh, took passage in a merchant ship which was going to Tarshish, a city on the coast of Spain, in exactly the opposite direction from Nineveh and almost at the other end of the then known world.

The recreant nation could not escape from its duty, however, or from the punishment which it deserved for disregarding God's will. From its selfish repose and sinful dreams it was rudely awakened by an Assyrian army which carried its people away into foreign captivity, where they were kept in a state of bondage for seventy years—as, according to the allegory, Jonah was beset by a mighty tempest, and cast into the sea, and then swallowed by a great fish, in whose stomach he remained for three days and three nights. The story does not say that the great fish was a whale; and in the Revised Version of the New Testament [Matt. 12:40], "sea-monster" is given as a marginal rendering. The sea-monster represented the Assyrian nation, while the three days and three nights represented the time of the Hebrew nation's captivity.

As we frequently speak of the American Eagle, the British Lion, and the Russian Bear, and represent the three nations by those particular animals, so the Hebrews represented the leading nations of antiquity by different animals, and especially by such of them as live in the sea.

In the seventh chapter of Daniel we read of four great beasts which came up from the sea, evidently symbolizing the four great world powers which pre-

vailed at that time. In the twenty-ninth chapter of the book of Ezekiel it is said, "Thus saith the Lord God; I am against thee, Pharaoh, King of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, where he hath said, My river is mine own and I have made it for myself"; and in the thirty-second chapter of the same book it is said, "Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou art as a whale in the seas." In the fifty-first chapter of Jeremiah it is said, "Nebuchabnezzar, the King of Babylon, hath devoured me, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicates. . . . And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up. . . . My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the Lord." And in the twenty-seventh chapter of Isaiah it is said, "In that day the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent, and He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea"; and, again, "In that day the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem." In these passages of Scripture, Assyria and Egypt are specifically mentioned as sea-monsters, and are said to have swallowed the people of Israel, and it is prophesied that those people shall be released from captivity.

The prophecy was fulfilled when, not many years afterward, the Assyrians were conquered by the Medes and the Persians, whose ruler, the famous Cyrus, set

the Israelites at liberty and permitted them to return to the land of Judea—which is represented in the allegory by the statement that, after having been swallowed by the sea-monster, Jonah was vomited out by it upon the dry land.

According to the allegory, while Jonah was imprisoned in the belly of the sea-monster, he prayed for deliverance, and quoted from the book of Psalms certain passages which seemed to be appropriate to the occasion—which correctly represents what the Israelites did during their Assyrian captivity; for the record shows that, during that time, they gave frequent expression to lamentations and petitions and repetitions of the language of their prophets and psalmists. “They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses.”

But, alas, after returning to the land of Judea, the nation was as selfish and self-willed as before, and was not willing that the rest of the world should be saved. It was willing to denounce the Gentiles on account of their sins, but not to have them admitted to the Kingdom of God. It was still unwilling to be a genuinely missionary nation—which is set forth in the allegory by the statement that, after finally going to Nineveh and threatening its inhabitants with destruction on account of their sins, Jonah was angry because they repented and received God’s forgiveness. Like his New Testament antitype, the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son, he was angry because his heavenly Father was merciful, not willing that any of His children should perish, but that they should turn from their evil ways and live.

The allegory then tells us of the complaint which Jonah made because of the decay of the gourd which

had temporarily sheltered him, and of the rebuke which the Lord gave to him on account of his selfishness. And there the allegory ends, with Jonah still hardening his heart towards the Gentiles, and the Lord reproving him for his selfishness and continuing to plead with him to be unselfish and kind to them.

That was the situation when Christ came to this world to carry out the divine purpose to which the nation had been recreant. It was still a stiff-necked and rebellious nation. It still hated the Gentiles, and refused to engage in any mission of love to them; and the sequel to the allegorical story of Jonah is found in what the New Testament says of that nation, together with its history from that time until now. In the year 70 of our era, it was again conquered by a foreign army and carried into captivity. The Roman Eagle swooped down upon it and flew off with it to the other end of the Mediterranean Sea, whence it was afterwards scattered all over the earth. Whether it will ever again return to the land of Judea remains to be seen. If the Zionists succeed with their project, it will; and some of the indications are now pointing that way. Dismembered and scattered all over the earth, it somehow survives, as Jonah is said to have survived in the sea-monster, and may finally be restored to its original home.

But, however that may be, the great lesson of its history will remain just the same; and the story of Jonah, which was written for the admonition of that particular nation, is for our admonition also. If we are prudent, we shall profit by it.

First among its lessons for us is the great truth that God's love is co-extensive with humanity, impartially embracing all men, mercifully providing for the for-

givenness of their manifold sins and for their ultimate blessedness. The story teaches the same lesson, in that respect, which Peter learned by his vision on the housetop of Joppa—that we should call no man common or unclean, but recognize all human beings as the objects of God's love and care.

In the next place, it teaches that God's threatenings and punishments are never unjust or vindictive, but are always intended to produce reformation. As Jonah was punished to make him obedient, and as the Ninevites were threatened with destruction to make them repent of their sins, so it is with all mankind: for “God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; but though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies” [Lam. 3: 31-33]. It is for our profit that He chastens us, to make us partakers of His holiness [Heb. 12: 10].

And, finally, this story teaches us that they who are at any time chosen by God to be the special recipients of His truth and His blessings are thereby obligated to be loving and generous and helpful towards those who are not so highly favoured. It teaches that the elect are under a solemn obligation to do missionary work among those who are non-elect, even in the most far-away parts of the earth. “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” said Jesus to His original band of disciples; and as long as the gospel has not been preached to any part of our race, or is not accepted by every one, it will be the duty of His disciples to do missionary work for Him, either personally or by proxy; and none of them can neglect it without condemnation.

Never was the opportunity greater than now. As Nineveh was ready for the preaching of Jonah, so the

whole non-Christian world is now ready for the missionaries of the gospel of Christ. Oh, that this nation were a missionary nation to the full extent of its wonderful opportunity and ability! And, oh, that all of us were so imbued with the missionary spirit that our missionaries in foreign lands could always depend on our generous support and encouragement!

*“ Shall we, whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?
Salvation, O, Salvation!
The joyful sound proclaim.
Till earth's remotest nation
Has learned Messiah's name.”*

IX

GOD'S ELECT: WHO AND WHY?

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

—ROM. 8:33.

NEVER was there a more chivalrous soldier of the cross than the man who wrote these defiant words, in answer to those who were finding fault with his missionary work. There were a great many such fault-finders, not only among the heathen people but also among those Christianized Jews who insisted that all Christians should obey the laws of the Jews. The heathen people charged him with irreligion and irreverence because he opposed their idolatry, and the Judaizers charged him with heresy and hypocrisy and selfishness and foolishness because he opposed their narrow-mindedness. Some of those accusations are answered by him in the eleventh and twelfth chapters of his second letter to the Corinthians. But here, instead of answering them in detail, he simply throws down the gauntlet to all of the fault-finders and challenges them to prove anything against him and his fellow-labourers, whom he calls God's elect. In justification of his work and his methods he appeals to God and to Christ, Who have chosen him for the work and to Whom he is strictly accountable. "It is God that justifieth," he says; "who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

And history now shows that his challenge was justified. It shows that his teaching was justified, that his methods were justified, and that he was personally justified. It shows that he was what he claimed to be, a person whom God had elected to preach the Christian religion, to make converts among the Gentiles, and so to prepare the way for the great consummation when all mankind shall be saved.

But, strange to say, during the last fifteen centuries most Christians have greatly mistaken his meaning. Ever since the time of Augustine it has been assumed by the most of them that the elect, in the Scriptural sense of the expression, are those whom God has elected out of the great mass of mankind to be saved from everlasting punishment, while all of the others, not being so elected, are irrevocably doomed to such a destiny. It has been assumed that God's purpose in thus electing a certain portion of mankind to be saved has been to promote His own glory, which, according to the Westminster Confession of Faith, is equally promoted by the damnation of the rest of mankind. According to that historic and remarkable document, the number of the elect was determined before they were born, and, indeed, before the world was made, and is so certain and definite that it can be neither increased nor diminished; and, furthermore, it was determined without reference to either their faith or their works or their moral character, and was due to nothing else but His own counsel and pleasure and immutable purpose. That is to say, according to the Calvinistic doctrine, the election of those who are to be saved is simply a matter of good luck or good fortune, so far as they are concerned, for which they should be devoutly thankful.

The Arminian doctrine agrees with the Calvinistic in saying that the elect are those persons who are to be saved by God's grace from the everlasting damnation which will certainly be the destiny of all of the rest of mankind. But it denies that the number can be neither increased nor diminished and that it was determined beforehand without reference to anything in the persons themselves. It says that God has elected them because He foresaw that they would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and, furthermore, that if any of them cease to believe in Him, they will then cease to be elected, and must suffer accordingly.

In short, the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism in regard to those persons who are called the elect is as to whether their election is unconditional and irrevocable or conditional and to be revoked, if they disobey its requirements. Around that question great controversies have been waged in the past. In fact, the dispute about that matter between the Calvinists and the Arminians has resembled that of certain scientists who, in the early days of our modern discoveries about electricity, disputed as to whether it consisted of one fluid or of two, whereas we have now discovered that it is no fluid at all. And so, if we intelligently study the Bible in regard to those persons whom it calls the elect, we find that the Calvinists and the Arminians are equally mistaken, inasmuch as it negatives the assumption that God has elected the elect either for the purpose of saving them from everlasting damnation, or merely to show His own power and to promote His own glory.

We shall find that His purpose in electing them includes their salvation in the final result, but that it refers, first of all, not to their final salvation, but to

their immediate activity in doing, as His agents, what He wants them to do.

The original Greek word which is rendered "elect" in our English version of the New Testament is more frequently rendered "chosen," which means the same thing. To elect is to choose, and the translators have used the two words interchangeably. And if we study the Bible carefully, to see for what purpose God has elected those persons to whom the expression refers, we find that in every instance He has chosen or elected them not merely for their own future salvation or damnation, but primarily for His service and for the service of humanity on this side of the grave.

He elected Abraham from among all of the inhabitants of Chaldea to be the founder of a new nation, not merely for his own sake, but that through him and his posterity all families of the earth might eventually have a blessing. Later on, He elected Moses, whom the Psalmist expressly calls "His chosen," to lead the people of Israel out of their Egyptian captivity, for the furtherance of the same purpose for which Abraham was elected. Later still, He elected David, of whom the Psalmist declares that "He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfold," for the furtherance of the same great purpose. And for that purpose He elected the whole Jewish nation—or, perhaps I should say, the Jewish nation as a whole—to be unto Him a peculiar people,—not, as some of them foolishly and arrogantly imagined, as a matter of favouritism for their selfish advantage, but, as He told them, by means of His chosen prophets, to be a light to the Gentiles, a missionary nation through whose instrumentality the people of all nations should come to know Him and worship Him.

And then, after Christ's advent—Who Himself came as God's agent in the cause of humanity—the same principle was followed out in the election of His apostles. They were chosen not merely with reference to their personal salvation, but as missionaries and servants for the salvation of others. "Ye have not chosen me," He told them, "but I have chosen you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain"; and in His last prayer for them He prayed that they might all be one, even as He and the Father were one, that the world might know that the Father had sent Him. He told them that they were to be the light of the world, and the salt of the earth, and the leaven in humanity, and the seed of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

And when Paul was converted, on the highway near Damascus, God said in regard to him, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." That is how and why he became one of the elect. He was elected to carry out God's will, for the salvation of the human race.

The same was true of the whole body of Christians in those days. They were called God's elect, and were told that He had chosen them as fellow-labourers in redeeming the world. "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth," said St. James to the readers of his general epistle, "that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures"; and St. Peter said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

We see, then, that, according to the Bible, God elects

people not as a matter of favouritism, and not merely for their own advantage, but to do His work in the world and to help in carrying out His purpose for the salvation of the human race. He elects them not in order to give them "the spoils of office," but that they may use their election as a sacred trust for the advantage of their fellowmen; not for selfishness, but for service.

And it is very evident, moreover, that He elects them not, as the Westminster Confession declares, without reference to anything in themselves as a reason for electing them, but, on the contrary, with direct reference to their fitness for what He desires of them—their fitness being determined by their ability and their willingness. In every instance which is mentioned in the Bible, it is evident that the election depended on those two things—ability and willingness to render the kind of service which the Lord had in view. Abraham, Moses, every one of the prophets, David, the Jewish nation, the twelve apostles, Paul and his fellow-workers, were elected because of their special fitness for the work which was required of them. They had the ability and the willingness, and therefore God elected them. He never makes any mistakes in regard to those whom He chooses. He knows before electing them just what their qualifications are. He reads their minds and their hearts and knows everything concerning them. And if, after He has elected them, they cease for any reason, to have the fitness which He required of them, He no longer elects them, but removes their names from His service book and puts others in place of them. That is what He did with the Jewish nation, which forfeited its election by its unwillingness to accept Christ and be a missionary nation—just as

Judas did by his unfaithfulness to the service of Christ. Judas was originally one of the apostles who were chosen by Christ, and for a while he was true to Him; but afterwards he fell away; and then the Saviour, knowing his heart, even before he himself was fully aware of his wickedness, sorrowfully said to all of them, "Have I not chosen you twelve"—or elected you twelve—"and one of you is a devil." From being one of the elect Judas became one of the non-elect by reason of his unfaithfulness. Thousands of others have done so. The number of the elect, instead of being so definite that it can be neither increased nor diminished, is constantly varying, because it is determined by the number of those who are fitted for it.

God chooses those, and only those, whom He knows to be qualified for what He wants them to do. And He sometimes chooses very strangely, from a merely human point of view. The persons whom He elects are not always the ones whom their fellowmen would elect. On the contrary, they are quite as frequently despised and persecuted by the very people in whose service the Almighty is using them. "Ye see your calling, brethren," said St. Paul to his fellow-Christians, "how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence."

The early Christians were despised by the upper

classes of society, who scoffed at their claims and derided their teachings, as a good many people used to scoff at the Salvation Army. They could not, or would not, admit that such people had any real commission to do God's work in the world. But they had, nevertheless. And so have many other people, whose ideas may seem strange to us and whose methods may not be just the same as our own. It is not necessary for God's elect to think exactly alike, nor to use exactly the same methods. Even the apostles had their differences, and Peter and Paul once engaged in a dispute which almost led to a rupture of their ecclesiastical relationship. But God elected and used all of them, each to do in his own way his own part of the work for which Jesus, their Lord and Master, had come to this world.

In secular history, also, there are numberless illustrations of the same divine principle—that God elects certain people for certain great purposes according to their fitness for the work which He wants them to do.

We are told in the Bible that He elected Cyrus, King of Persia, to deliver the people of Israel from their Babylonian captivity. And no less certainly He elected Columbus to discover this continent, and the Pilgrim Fathers to establish a new commonwealth in this country, and George Washington to command the victorious army which delivered it from the yoke of political bondage, and Abraham Lincoln to be its President during the sectional warfare which resulted in the liberation of four millions of slaves. All of those great leaders were God's chosen agents, and every one of them did his work against great opposition. Every one of them was accused of incompetency or foolishness or

unworthy motives and suffered accordingly. But God has abundantly justified them, as He justifies every one who is faithful to the service for which He has chosen him, whether in preaching the gospel or in doing anything else for the good of mankind.

*"In God's great field of labour
All work is not the same;
He hath a service for each one
Who loves His holy name."*

One person may be elected to serve as a clergyman, another as a social service worker, another as a social or political reformer, another as a student and scholar and educator, another as a merchant, another as an artist, another as an inventor, another as a musician, another in any one of a hundred pursuits, each of which is helpful to the welfare of humanity; and the important thing is that, whatever a person's particular calling may be, he shall have a high ideal concerning it and be invariably true thereto, doing his work in such a way as to have God's approval, regardless of what mankind may say.

Be among the elect, then, by using your talents, many or few, in the service of God and humanity. Never find fault with any person who is doing the Lord's work in a different way from your own. And never let any fault-finding prevent you from doing it to the best of your ability as God tells you to do it by His voice in your soul. Choose Him for your director, and He will choose you, and direct you, and justify you, and glorify you in His own befitting time and way.

X

THINKING AND BEING

“Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats; for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he. Eat and drink, saith he; but his heart is not with thee.”—PROV. 23:6, 7.

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”—PHIL. 4:8.

AMONG the many Scriptural sayings which are often misquoted and misapplied, there are but few which are so treated with greater frequency than that portion of my text which says that “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” A great many persons suppose it to say that “as a man thinketh, so is he”; and not a few of them suppose that it is a genuine proof text of the doctrine that a person’s corporeal condition is entirely dependent on his mental condition, being nothing but a reflection of the thoughts which he holds. They would have us believe that, according to the inspired writer’s meaning, we are warm or cold, weak or strong, sick or healthy, only as we think that we are so, and that we can change the condition by merely changing our thinking.

But the inspired writer did not say that “as a man thinketh, so is he.” He did not even say that “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” He said, “As he thinketh in his heart, so is he,” and the context very

plainly shows that, instead of referring to people in general, he was referring only to a certain kind of people, and that, instead of referring to their thinking about their physical condition, he was referring to their disposition as hypocrites and enemies.

Be not deceived by false professions of friendship, nor beguiled by an evil-minded person who, to serve his own purposes, invites you to dine with him and feeds you with luxuries; for, notwithstanding his professions and his appearance of hospitality, his heart is not with you, and, instead of being your friend, he is really your enemy; he is not what he pretends to be; he is what his thoughts would indicate if you could look into his heart and see what his intentions are,—that, and that only, is what the passage really means. It means, that as the Bard of Avon says, “a man may smile, and smile, and be a villain,” and that, as Robert Burns says,

*“The heart aye’s the past aye
That makes us right or wrang.”*

And that is an exceedingly serious truth, with a great number of applications. For what any person really is does not depend on his verbal statements, nor even on his reputation, but on what we call his moral character; and that is determined by the thoughts which he holds.

If a person’s thoughts are all pure and honest and loving, then his character, as a matter of course, is correspondingly good. But if his thoughts are vile and dishonest, no matter what his words or his conduct may be, his character is bad, and he is equally so. In the sight of God, he is exactly such a man as his thinking implies. It is impossible for a good man to cherish bad thoughts, or for a bad man to cherish good thoughts,

as a general rule. Each of them thinks habitually according to his character, and determines his character by means of his thinking. Tell me what sort of thoughts a person commonly has, and I will tell you what sort of a person he is.

To be sure, any person may occasionally have wandering thoughts, which vary from the usual train of his thinking, without having his character determined thereby. A good man may occasionally have bad thoughts, and a bad man may occasionally have good thoughts, without being deeply affected or materially changed by them. They may soon pass away, and leave his character very nearly the same as before. Even such thoughts, however, are likely to have some influence on him who gives way to them. No one who thinks either a good thought or a bad thought is entirely unaffected by it. God can see, if we cannot, that he is either somewhat the better or somewhat the worse for it. And the more frequently a person has such thoughts, the more he is affected by them, and the more likely to form a habit of thinking in that way. Jesus has said that for every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account in a day of judgment; and the reason is that such words give expression to their thoughts. The thoughts register themselves by a psychological process on the characters of those who speak them. And so it is with unspoken thoughts. For good or for ill, our characters are affected by them.

Moreover, a person's thinking greatly contributes to his happiness or his unhappiness. It is a common mistake to suppose that happiness and unhappiness are chiefly dependent on outward conditions, and that if we could make everybody well off in regard to such matters we should be able to drive misery out of the

world. But the fact is far otherwise. Some people who are exceptionally well off in regard to outward conditions are exceptionally miserable, nevertheless; while some whose outward circumstances are very far from propitious are nevertheless very cheerful. A person's happiness or unhappiness lies chiefly in his way of thinking. If his thoughts, like a sunflower, habitually turn in the direction of brightness, if he mentally faces towards that which is hopeful and cheerful, then, no matter what his outward condition may be, he has the secret of happiness within his own breast and nothing can deprive him of it. But, if his thoughts are like the night-shade, which blooms in dampness and gloominess, then, no matter what his outward condition may be, he will be full of unhappiness. As Milton has beautifully and forcefully said,

*"He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit i' the center and enjoy bright day;
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the midday sun;
Himself is his own dungeon."*

And not only does a person's thinking have a decided effect on his inward condition, but it is likely to have a marked effect on his outward condition. It may have a distinct effect on his physical organs, either helping them or impeding them in the performance of their functions. Multitudes of persons have made themselves sick by constantly thinking that they were sick, or that they were going to be sick, and nervously giving way to hypochondriac fancies. And multitudes of others have kept themselves in good health by refusing to allow their thoughts ever to run in such channels. More than that, many persons have been cured of sick-

ness by simply turning their thoughts into channels of healthfulness, especially in cases where, wholly or partly, the sickness had a mental origin.

We need not accept the extravagant doctrine that all diseases are merely mental and are mentally curable. That doctrine is contradicted by the experience of mankind, and no good reason has ever been shown for believing it. But it is true, nevertheless, that the mind often has a powerful effect on the body, and that, in order to be cured, certain sick people need only to stop thinking of their sickness, and go about their work or their pleasure in life with a proper observance of the principles of hygiene. No less than in Shakespeare's time it is often seen that

*"When the mind is quickened, out of doubt
The organs, though defunct and dead before,
Break up their drowsy grave, and newly move
With casted slough and fresh legerity."*

That is why a course of travel sometimes benefits a sick man. It diverts his mind from his ailments. It turns his thoughts away from his aches and his pains and his nervous system, and, by giving him new thoughts of an agreeable kind, removes the nervous irritation and gives nature a chance, which it quickly improves, to restore the diseased organs to their normal condition.

Exactly how the mind is related to the body, and precisely how they affect each other, is fully known to no one excepting Him who created them. The physiologists and psychologists have thrown some light on the matter, and perhaps they will give us further light by-and-by. But we do not need any more in order to see that, in some way, the body and the mind are very

closely related and that each of them has an effect on the other's condition.

Every one knows that great mental excitement, either of joy or of sorrow, may destroy a person's appetite and prevent him from sleeping. Mental fear, mental sorrow, and mental anxiety have physical effects, sometimes of an exceedingly serious nature. Cases have been known, indeed, in which persons have died from fear alone, or from thinking that they were to die at a specified time, on account of their belief in a fortune-teller's prediction.

It is said that certain Roman Catholics, by intently fixing their thoughts for a long time on the crucifix, and especially on the marks of the nails which were driven into the Saviour's hands and feet, have received blood-red marks in their own hands and feet, and have regarded them as tokens of his heavenly favour. Until recently most Protestants have disbelieved such reports, attributing them either to falsehood or to a diseased imagination; but some of the most competent Protestant authorities now admit that such cases do really occur, and psychologists say that they are caused by auto-suggestion—which simply means that the devotee, by fixing his thoughts on the Saviour's wounds, suggests the reception of such marks in his own hands and feet and so causes a congestion of blood in those places.

Yes, the mind has a mysterious relation to the body, and the nature of a person's thinking may greatly modify the performance of his physical functions. "A merry heart," as the Scripture says, "doeth good like a medicine"; and it may sometimes do away with the need of medicine. Cheerful, hopeful, prayerful thoughts are a wonderful help to one's bodily health. They help to keep him out of the doctor's hands; and

when it becomes necessary to summon a doctor, they work together with the doctor to restore him to health.

Furthermore, a person's thinking is the most important factor in determining his conduct. In the long run, his habitual thinking is quite sure to be expressed in his behaviour; and even what he thinks for a passing moment may result in very serious practical consequences. Conduct, as a rule, is the expression of thought; and it is owing to that fact that society has come to its present condition. It is responsible for the best and the worst features of our civilization. Shakespeare makes Cæsar say of Cassius, "He thinks too much; such men are dangerous"; and if men think too much in a certain way, they are certainly the most dangerous men in the community. If they think approvingly of anarchy, or tyranny, or licentiousness, or robbery, or political chicanery by which to enrich themselves, then, the more they think the more dangerous they are. "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," says the Scripture, and the only way in which to obey that injunction is not to think of such fulfilment without being averse to it. To think of it longingly, or even doubtfully, is to make some provision for it; it is to take the first step towards it. Whereas he who thinks of doing beneficent things is thereby making provision for their actual accomplishment. As long as the world stands, people will act, for the most part, according to their thinking. Their thoughts will continue to be the seeds of their conduct, the sources from which their behaviour will spring.

Evidently, therefore, it makes a great difference whether a person controls his thoughts or lets them wander uncontrolled, and whether he thinks of noble or of ignoble things. No one is more mistaken than

he who assumes that there is no harm in merely thinking whatever he likes to think. As well assume that it makes no difference what kind of a captain has charge of a ship, as long as it avoids a shipwreck. It may keep a safe course, for some distance at least, under an ignorant or a drunken or a disloyal captain or under one whose intentions are those of a pirate; but what about the conditions inside of that ship and the likelihood of its continuing to the end of its voyage with no injury to any one? The thinking part of a man is the ruler of his conduct, the captain of his complex nature; and what he thinks is therefore a matter of the greatest importance. It makes all of the difference between a good man and a bad man, a contented man and a wretched man, a man whose life is a blessing to himself and to others and one whose life is a miserable burden to himself and the community.

How important, then, to control our thoughts in obedience to the exhortation, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things"! That is the right way for us. It is the way for us to be what we ought to be. Let us carefully follow it, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," that the same mind may be in us which was also in Him; for so shall we cultivate true manhood and womanhood, and so shall an entrance be ministered unto us abundantly into His eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy.

XI

HAVING AND BEING

“Jesus said unto him, If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”—MATT. 19:21.

THE young man to whom Jesus spoke these words was possessed of great wealth and high standing in society, and also of an excellent moral character, according to the ordinary rules of morality. Amiable, free from vices, and religiously inclined, he had many of the qualities which would have fitted him to be a teacher and an exemplar of Christianity; and, knowing what was in him, Jesus desired to have him as one of His followers.

And no less does He now desire to have every such person take part in the great work which His Church has to do. Far from denying or despising the good qualities of those persons who have not accepted His leadership, He appreciates them and wishes to utilize them in the highest degree. He longs to have them inside of His organized kingdom, where they can be of the greatest service to God and mankind; and that is where they ought to be. Such people should be in the organization which is entitled to the service of all right-minded men, and they should be persuaded to enter it—as precious stones should be taken from the earth or the sea and be placed in an appropriate setting, that their beauty and brilliancy may be fully displayed. The most appropriate setting for any person's

good qualities is the organized Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. There they are seen to the best advantage, and there they can do the most good. The rich young ruler, even if he had been a much more virtuous man than he was, ought to have followed Jesus Christ and to have become one of His helpers, not only because of the help which he could have given but also because of the help which he needed to receive.

For rich though he was and highly esteemed by his acquaintances, he nevertheless was not satisfied. He felt that something was lacking, without which he could never be fully contented. And therefore, having heard that Jesus was promising eternal life, he went to Him, and said, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" His idea of eternal life was somewhat vague and imperfect. Just what the promised blessing was, he did not distinctly understand; but, regarding it as something which was eminently desirable, he inquired what he should do as a means of obtaining it.

Instead of immediately answering his question, Jesus asked him a question, and then followed it with a statement whose meaning is very commonly misunderstood. "Why callest thou me good?" said He; "there is none good but one, that is God."

This saying is often used by Trinitarian theologians as a proof of the doctrine that Jesus is God. They contend that if Jesus told the truth, either He Himself is God or He was not even a good man, and that we must therefore accept Him as God, or believe that He was conscious of sinfulness.

That such was not His meaning, however, is very evident from a number of Biblical passages in which goodness is ascribed to certain persons who were mani-

fectly no more than human. For instance, we are told that John the Baptist was "a just man and holy" [Mark 6:20]; that Joseph of Arimathea was "a good man and a just" [Luke 23:50]; that Barnabas was "a good man and full of the Holy Ghost" [Acts 11:24]; that there are "spirits of just men made perfect" [Heb. 12:23]; and that the angels are "holy" [Rev. 14:10]. If, therefore, the Saviour's statement that none is good but God proves that He Himself is God, it proves that all of those other good persons are God, and that there are not merely three persons, constituting a Trinity, but many thousands of persons to whom Deity should be attributed. And, on the other hand, if the goodness of such persons does not prove that they are God, neither does Christ's goodness prove Him to be God. To interpret His statement as proving either His Deity or His sinfulness is to put too great a strain upon it, a strain which it was surely not intended to bear.

The purpose of Jesus, in speaking as He did, was not to claim Deity or anything else for Himself, but to bring the young ruler face to face with the fact that the ultimate source of all goodness is God, and that no one else can rightly claim any goodness for Himself excepting as God gives it to Him. He never personally claimed any goodness or wisdom excepting that which He derived from His heavenly Father. "The words that I speak unto you," said He, "I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works"; and, again, "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in himself, and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." He was spiritually perfect because the spirit of the Father was

given to Him without measure [John 3:34], inspiring Him in whatsoever He thought, said, and did. But He saw that the young ruler was inclined to self-righteousness, as well as to the common habit of using empty, thoughtless compliments; and so He seized the opportunity to give him a gentle rebuke on account of it, and to turn his thoughts away from all derivative goodness to the supreme righteousness and ineffable glory of God.

Then, for the purpose of bringing him to a realization of his actual need, He mentioned certain commandments which he ought to obey, including the second great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"; and finally He told him that, if he wished to be perfect, he should give away his worldly goods and become one of His followers in the great work of self-denial to which He was giving His life. Whereupon the young man's countenance fell, and he went away very sorrowful, because his affections were set on material things rather than on spiritual and heavenly things. Between the object which he had in view and that which Jesus set before him there was a difference so radical as to prevent him from accepting the proposal. What he desired was to *have* something—something which was called eternal life. What the Saviour proposed to him was, in the first place, to *be* something—to be perfect—and, as a consequence, to have treasure in heaven. In the young man's mind, the desire to possess something was the principal thing. But Jesus gave the foremost place to the desire to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. And that is what He always does. In His teachings, the question of having is always subordinate to the question of being. "Seek ye first," He says,

“the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” The young man was not doing so. To his way of thinking, having, not being, was the principal thing.

That is the trouble with the great majority of mankind in this world. As one of the Grecian dramatists observed, long ago,

*“By nature man is formed with boundless wishes
For prosperous fortune; and the great man’s door
Stands ever open to that envied person
On whom she smiles.”*

Mankind have by nature a passionate desire for worldly possessions and temporal pleasures; and in most people that desire is vastly stronger and more influential than the desire for perfection and heavenly things. Hence the lack of satisfaction, the schemings, the disappointments, the heartaches, the enmities, the frauds, and the crimes. It is the desire to have something rather than to be something that gives rise to the greater part of the iniquitous thoughts and the contemptible deeds with which people do despite to the nobility of their lineage as the offspring of God. It makes the lives of thousands of them a tumultuous scramble from the cradle to the grave. It makes them bestial in their conduct, like swine that jostle one another in their endeavour to secure the most of the swill, or like wolves that snarl at one another while they are devouring their wounded comrades that have fallen by the way. It is the cause of the unscrupulous competition in business which is said to be the life of trade, but which causes the destruction of many a trader, and also of the so-called “trusts” which crush all rival enterprises and threaten to subject our country to the

rule of a moneyed oligarchy. It is the cause of the detestable political corruption which disgraces our cities, our states, and our nation, and of the continuous warfare between capitalists and labourers, and of international conflicts all over the world. Jesus called it covetousness; and, like the covetousness of those people who struggled for the Rhinegold, in the Nibelungen legend, it always brings unhappiness to the people who harbour it.

And, sad to say, the desire to have something rather than to be something is not confined to unchurched people, nor are the objects to which it is directed confined to this world. It is held by many church members, and it determines their hopes for the future life as well as their church connections in the life that now is. For who can deny that with a great many people the main purpose of church membership is not so much to be perfect as to have a place in heaven after leaving this world? And how much better or more Christian is such a desire than that of him to whom the Saviour addressed the words of my text? Other-worldliness as a motive is no more Christian than worldliness. No person is a genuine disciple of Christ if he professes Christianity merely for what he expects to gain by it, outside of his own spiritual condition and character, whether here or hereafter, in this world or the world to come. The desire for gain is not godliness, no matter where the gain is expected to be. Worldliness and other-worldliness are pretty much the same thing.

However, do not understand me either to say or to imply that a desire to have the good things of this world, or that a desire to be happy after death, is unchristian; or that an effort to gratify such a desire is necessarily blameworthy. On the contrary, it is right

for us to desire such things and also to strive for them, to a reasonable extent and in a reasonable way. Jesus never condemned either the desire or the effort. But He condemned the very common habit of giving that desire the principal place and allowing it to be the ruling motive. Right enough in its place as a subordinate motive, it is wrong when exalted to the foremost position; for a person's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, but in the spirit or the character with which he possesses or renounces them, as the case may demand.

*"Manhood is the one immortal thing
Beneath time's changing sky,"*

and true manhood is the principal thing to be sought by us. Adapting the language of Hamlet's soliloquy, we may truthfully say, "To be, or not to be, that is the question." And if we decide, as we ought to, to try to be perfect, then the thing for us to do is to follow Jesus Christ in His life of devotion to the good of mankind.

To the young ruler He said, "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell that thou hast: and come, follow me." In that case, He intended that His advice should be literally taken; for He wanted the young man to be one of His companions, like Peter, Andrew, James, and John. To follow Him in that way is not possible in these days, nor does He now require His disciples to leave their worldly occupations or to sacrifice all of their worldly possessions. But He does require us to be willing to do so if it were necessary, and to make whatever sacrifices are really necessary for us in order to prove that our Christianity is not fictitious but genuine. He requires us to hold ourselves and all of our

worldly possessions in subservience to the interests of His heavenly Kingdom, and to be ready, at any moment, to spend and be spent for the good of His cause.

We cannot obtain eternal life by merely professing Christianity, nor can we become perfect by merely desiring to be so. We must do the things that make for perfectness; and that necessitates self-sacrifice. "If any man will come after me," said He, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"; and, while the conditions have greatly changed since then, the principle remains the same. To follow Him in a selfish spirit is an impossibility. They who try to do so must certainly fail. But they who actually follow Him in His life of unselfishness obtain the gift of eternal life.

Compare the case of the rich young ruler with that of the apostle Paul, who had also been a Jewish ruler of high standing and influence. The former refused to follow Jesus, because of his devotion to his worldly possessions. He kept them, and was a rich man presumably, in the world's estimation, till the day of his death. Whereas the apostle renounced his wealth and his station, counting them but dross in comparison with the riches of Christ, and thereafter lived and died a poor man in the estimation of the generality of the people who knew him. But which of the two was the richer in reality, and which was the one to be pitied on account of his poverty? When the one who turned away from Jesus came to the end of his earthly career, what were his assets in comparison with those of the servant of Christ? What did he leave behind him of any value to mankind, and what did he carry with him of any value to himself? Alas, how very little, so far as we know! While Paul, though poor in worldly

goods, was rich beyond measure in goods of the soul. Behind him, for the benefit of all future generations, he left a legacy whose value no person can estimate; and with him he carried into the other world such a perfected character, such sweetly singing memories of the good which he had done, and such a capacity for enjoying all heavenly things, as made him none the poorer, but rather the richer, because of his severance from all temporal things. For him to live was Christ, and to die was gain.

The way to be rich with the best kind of riches is to seek for perfection by following Christ.

XII

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF TRUTH

"What is truth?"—JOHN 18:38.

THERE are various ways of asking a question, and its meaning may largely depend on the manner of the questioner. The tone, the look, or the gesture with which the words are accompanied may determine their meaning, causing them to imply an affirmative or a negative answer, or that an answer of either sort is a matter of no consequence. Under the form of a question there may be a spirit of cynicism, or denial, or ridicule.

Pilate's question, "What is truth?" was evidently not asked with a desire to learn; because, as soon as he had asked it, instead of waiting for an answer, he went out of the room. And, although his remark was worded in the form of a question, it seems to have been really nothing more than an exclamation, and to have been uttered in a somewhat skeptical and contemptuous manner, as he went forth to the Jewish rulers who had brought Jesus before him, to tell them that he found no fault in Him.

Jesus had spoken of His kingdom; and in answer to the question, "Art thou a king, then?" He had said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." But a kingdom of truth was something of which Pilate had no comprehension. Truth, to his way

of thinking, was simply a matter for philosophers to dispute about and for visionaries to dream about—an abstraction, an illusory, impracticable thing, with which it was not worth his while to concern himself. He was a practical person, a man of the world. Facts were the things which chiefly engaged his attention. As for truth apart from facts—why, if Jesus desired to concern Himself with it, and liked to think that it made Him some sort of a king, Pilate had no objection. A king whose throne was so impalpable, and whose kingdom was so hard to find, was not, in his opinion, a dangerous character, or deserving of punishment. He regarded Jesus as merely a harmless visionary, and would have released Him if the Jewish rulers had not protested and threatened him.

Pilate was a type of the civilization of the age that he lived in. The old religions were rapidly passing away and giving place to a compulsory worship of the Emperor, while a spirit of militarism was everywhere dominant, and the moral standards of society were correspondingly low. Power was what most people chiefly respected, and their motives were chiefly of a worldly description. There were many exceptions, of course; but when he said, "What is truth?" in a way which evidently meant that it was a matter of no consequence, Pilate voiced what was probably the general feeling concerning it.

And, apparently, that is still a very prevalent feeling; for there are many people even now whose conduct plainly implies that they are of Pilate's opinion. Not many of them would be likely to give expression to it as he did; and some of them would not acknowledge it even to themselves. Actions speak louder than words, however, and the people who show by their con-

duct that they care but little for truth are altogether too numerous. If it serves their worldly ends, they use it. Other things being equal, they prefer it to untruth. But when it calls for any sacrifice of their possessions or their convenience, they are prone to turn away from it and to make compromises, if not open alliances, with falsehood.

Oh, the deceptions, the hypocrisies, the trickeries, the makeshifts, the intellectual juggleries, and the absolute falsehoods to which people resort rather than to tell the plain truth, in a great many instances!

How often truth stands, as it were, in the market place, where goods are being bought and sold, or in some place where politicians are conferring and scheming, or where an editor is writing an article for his newspaper, or where an advertiser is preparing an advertisement of his business, or where a witness is being questioned by a legal tribunal—how often truth stands there, as Christ stood before Pilate, mutely appealing to have its heavenly authority recognized, and is practically thrust aside as if its claim were of no consequence! How often, under such conditions, people practically say, “What is truth?” and ignore it!

The very fact that in our courts of law a distinction is made between falsehood and perjury, and that, to some extent, the same distinction is made by the populace,—a falsehood spoken under oath being regarded as vastly worse than an ordinary falsehood,—is an indication of the little regard which people have for truth itself. For if people in general were as truthful as they ought to be, or if they attributed to the simple truth the degree of importance which rightly belongs to it, there would be no need of requiring any one to swear to be truthful, in violation of the Saviour's com-

mandment to swear not at all. We should let our yea be yea, and our nay be nay, without any adjurations or superstitious embellishments; for our obligation to tell the truth is no greater or less because of an oath in regard to it, and a falsehood is no less a falsehood because no oath has been taken with reference to it.

The excuses which people make for not telling the truth when they are not under oath may be more or less plausible, but they are not justifiable.

Unquestionably, it is not an easy matter to be invariably truthful. Under certain circumstances it may cost a person the loss of money, the loss of position, the loss of friendship, the loss of popularity, the loss of liberty, or even the loss of life itself; and under such circumstances the temptation to be untruthful is correspondingly powerful. Excuses for untruthfulness are very easily invented; but none of them can bear to be tested by the teachings of Christ, or even by any one's conscience when it is not perverted by selfishness. Every person's conscience, if not somehow perverted, agrees with the Bible in regard to this matter. It corroborates what Jesus Christ taught in regard to it—that truth is something whose claims are imperative and immutable, something which we should always honour and love and obey, living for it, toiling for it, and, if necessary, dying for it.

If it be asked why the truth should be so highly esteemed, the answer is that it should be esteemed, in the first place, for its own sake, because it is inherently worthy of such regard and such treatment. And if any one questions why the truth has such worthiness, or why untruth is not more worthy still if it happens to be more profitable, he can only be referred to truth itself for an answer—as he would be referred to beauty

itself if he should question the fact of its superiority to ugliness, or to harmony if he should question why it is better than discord. If a person is so deficient in æsthetic perceptiveness that he cannot see that beauty and harmony are better than their opposites, there is no use in trying to prove it to him. And if a person is so deficient in moral perceptiveness that he does not recognize the superiority of truth over falsehood, there is no use in trying to prove it to him. One might as well try to show a sunset to a blind man, or play a symphony to a deaf man. Truth declares its own excellence, its own majesty and authority, to people whose moral sense is not dead or perverted, and they know that it deserves to be loved and obeyed. They know that when they depart from it, they deserve condemnation. They may say with Pilate, "What is truth?" and may try by various subterfuges to avoid their obligations to it; but its demands are inexorable and there is no honourable escape from them. We should highly esteem it, and be invariably loyal to it, because of its inherent rightfulness and its natural claim to our obedience.

And, furthermore, we should do so because of the effect which such loyalty has on our characters, and because of the contrary effect of disloyalty.

To the formation of a good character, nothing is more essential than the habit of truthfulness. Many elements enter into it, but none of them is of greater importance than truthfulness, and nothing else can take the place of it. It was one of Tennyson's sayings that "a truthful man generally has all of the virtues"; and if by truthfulness we mean not merely abstention from untruthfulness, but the love of truth for its own sake and the consequent practice of it,—if we mean by it what the Bible calls "truth in the inward parts,"—the

saying bears examination remarkably well. For, in order to be truthful in that sense of the word, a person must be honest and courageous and unselfish, and where you find honesty and courage and unselfishness you are pretty sure to find purity and generosity and gentleness and whatsoever other qualities are lovely and of good report.

A thoroughly truthful person is likely to be free from all meanness of character. He can be trusted in anything, as a general rule. But beware of the person who will sacrifice truth for his gain or convenience. He is a broken reed to lean upon. His untruthfulness vitiates his character and unfits him not only for being trusted by others but for trusting himself and respecting himself and enjoying a consciousness of the approval of God. He may make some worldly gain by it, but, though he gain the whole world, he loses far more than he can possibly gain by it, because he loses spiritual life, the true life of the soul. Says a familiar quotation,

*“’Tis man’s perdition to be safe
When for the truth he ought to die”;*

which is simply a paraphrase of what Jesus declared, that whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for the gospel shall save it. “Safety first” is a good motto if we always give precedence to spiritual safety; otherwise it is often a cowardly plea. Be truthful, at whatsoever risk of any lower kind of safety.

And now perhaps some one is mentally asking whether the truth should always be told, no matter what the circumstances, or whether, under certain cir-

cumstances, an untruth may be allowable or even advisable. It is an old question, often debated, with many practical bearings which must be faced by us from time to time.

Shall a physician, for example, tell the truth to his patients even in cases where their knowledge of it might prevent their recovery? Shall he tell the truth to an insane person when the effect might be dangerous to himself and to others? Shall a policeman tell the truth to a person whom he is trying to detect in a crime? Shall a military spy, in time of warfare, tell the truth to his country's enemies? Ought Rahab to have told the truth to the men who were pursuing the Israelite spies whose lives she saved by concealing them on her house-top in Jericho? May we ever tell an untruth to prevent people from doing an injury to themselves or to others?

I cannot answer that question any better, perhaps, than by calling attention to the distinction which Plato makes, in his "Republic," between what he calls a "lie in the soul" and a merely verbal untruth such as constitutes a fiction. He says that the former is never allowable, but that the latter may sometimes be used as a medicine; and I think that he is right about it. I think that there is actually such a distinction, and that, while the border line between an actual lie and a merely verbal untruth may occasionally be difficult for a person to determine if he has not a thoroughly truthful soul, there is no such difficulty for a person who has such a soul. If you have a thoroughly truthful soul—if you have what the Bible calls "truth in the inward parts"—you will have no doubt as to whether or not you are justified in using a verbal deception in any particular instance.

There are certainly times when a suppression of truth is allowable. Jesus Himself suppressed the truth in regard to His Messiahship, and told His disciples to suppress it, till the proper time for proclaiming it. And yet there are times when the suppression of a truth may be equivalent to the most contemptible kind of a falsehood. Fiction is justifiable when it is used without disguise, as Jesus used it in His parables; and yet it may be used in such a way as to amount to a falsehood. Deception is sometimes justifiable; and yet deception very often amounts to a falsehood.

We may be absolutely sure of one thing, no matter what the circumstances: a real lie is never justifiable, nor is anything allowable which amounts to a lie. And we need to remember that even a truth may be told in such a manner as to convey an erroneous and injurious impression. A half-truth may be more harmful than an out-and-out falsehood. A bit of gossip which states nothing but an actual fact may have a malicious purpose and do incalculable injury. We cannot justify ourselves for injurious statements by merely proving their accuracy. We must be able to show that they were in the interests of justice and humanity. We are told by St. Paul that the object of Christianity is to bring us all to a perfect manhood, that we be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but that, speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. "Speaking the truth in love"—ah, that is the correct rule for us. That is the principle by which to determine what we may say or may not say. Truth and love should go together; and he who loves both God

and man will never lie to anybody or speak the truth in such a way as to do any injury. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour. It seeks the highest good of all, and uses only such methods as the Holy Spirit approves. Cultivate that spirit then, and let it regulate your thoughts and your words and your deeds.

*“Whatever dims the sense of truth,
Or stains thy purity,
Though light as breath of summer air,
Count it as sin to thee.*

*“Preserve the tablet of thy thoughts
From every blemish free,
While the Redeemer’s lowly faith
Its temple makes with thee.*

*“And pray of God that grace be given
To tread time’s narrow way;
How dark soever it may be
It leads to cloudless day.”*

XIII

BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

"So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning."—JOB 42: 12.

THE book of Job is a dramatic poem, dealing with one of the deepest problems that exercise the human mind—viz., what is the meaning of the sufferings of the innocent, and why does the Almighty ordain or permit them?

It is the story of a good man who was greatly afflicted, and whose acquaintances assumed that he was being punished for some sin which he had committed, although they were not aware of any. Some of them openly accused him of secret iniquity, declaring that, if he were really as good as he had seemed to be, God would not have subjected him to such terrible suffering: an accusation which he indignantly denied and resented. No, said he, that is not the truth; why I am thus afflicted God only knows, but I have certainly not deserved it; I have lived a good life; and if I knew where to find Him, I would justify myself before Him; but when I looked for good on account of my conduct, then evil came to me; and, when I waited for light, then darkness came to me.

It seemed to him that he was being treated unjustly and cruelly, and he was tempted for a while to be rebellious towards God. His wife renounced her faith, and advised him to do likewise; but, notwithstanding his dreadful sufferings, he overcame the temptation and

humbly submitted to the divine decree which he could not understand. Whereupon, says the story, God restored him to prosperity, and gave him so much more that he was better off in the end than if he had never passed through such a sorrowful experience. What he had lamented as an undeserved and unmitigated evil proved to be a source of blessing to him, and out of what had seemed to be impenetrable darkness he received the light of a great faith in the goodness of God.

In short, the event proved that his affliction had been a blessing in disguise; and, taken as a whole, his experience illustrated a divine principle whose workings are often seen in the affairs of mankind. For it very frequently occurs that something which seemed to be evil is afterwards proved to be good by the results which it shows. Many things which seemed like curses are proved to have been actually blessings in disguise. Samson's riddle—"Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness"—is continually having new illustrations of its significance as God carries on His work in the lives of mankind,

*"From seeming evil still educating good,
And better thence in infinite progression."*

Consider, for example, what has often been called the original curse of mankind—the necessity of labour. We are told by certain theologians that when Adam was driven out of the garden of Eden, and was sentenced to toil for his living during the rest of his life, the necessity which was thus imposed upon him and his posterity was in the nature of a punishment on account of his sin; and it is often assumed that mankind would be much better off if that inherited necessity had not

been incurred. It is assumed that they might always have lived in the garden of Eden, or that the whole world would be a garden, in which they would have nothing to do but to enjoy themselves; and it is also assumed that such a state of affairs would be highly beneficial to them.

The incorrectness of such an assumption is very easily shown. For even now there are actually some parts of the world whose inhabitants have to work scarcely at all for a living, so abundantly does nature provide for their needs. In some tropical countries the natives subsist almost entirely on such fruits as the earth produces without cultivation, and the climate is such that they require no clothing excepting the very little which modesty calls for. Living is very easy in those parts of the world. But what sort of men and women do such conditions produce? Contrast the inhabitants of such countries with those who live where it is necessary to work for a living; and which are the better off? Which are the stronger, the healthier, the more intelligent and progressive, and the better able to enjoy themselves? Which show the higher type of character?

Or contrast the children of wealthy parents with the children of parents in moderate circumstances; and which of them, as a rule, make the best men and women, the most moral, the most competent, the most useful, the happiest? There are many exceptions, undoubtedly; but, as a general rule, is it not true that those children who are not educated to feel the necessity of working do not become as praiseworthy or as useful to society as those whose circumstances oblige them to work for a living? Is it not a well known fact that a great majority of the world's most conspic-

uous leaders have been spurred on by the stern necessity of toiling for their daily bread? To have been released from that necessity would not have been a blessing to them. It would have been an evil thing for themselves and the world.

The necessity of labour doubtless presses too severely on some people; but even then, as a rule, it is better than idleness, and many of those who rebel against it are being benefited by it far more than they know.

For, in the first place, it is one of the best safeguards against the assaults of temptation. The familiar old saying that Satan always finds something for idle people to do originated in the common experience of mankind. Indeed, if we take the story as literally true, it was while Adam and Eve had no work to perform that Satan successfully tempted them and accomplished their downfall. Their idleness provided him with a favourable opportunity for persuading them to eat the forbidden fruit. The necessity of working has saved many a person from being thus beguiled into going astray. It is a great blessing in that respect.

And it is also a great blessing because it contributes to our enjoyment of what we acquire by means of it. For whenever we have obtained what we desire by working for it, we feel that it is ours in a way which is better and more satisfactory than if it had come to us without any effort on our part. We have not only a pleasant consciousness of ownership in regard to it, but also a pleasant consciousness of success in obtaining it, and a pleasant feeling of self-approval on account of the victory.

And, furthermore, a life of labour is necessary for the development of the best kind of character. Habit-

ual idleness causes weakness of character, as lack of physical exercise causes muscular flabbiness. To be mentally and morally and spiritually vigorous, we must have some useful occupation. Said Jesus to some of the Jews who found fault with Him, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Work is one of the essential conditions of godliness.

The necessity of labour, then, is not a curse, but a blessing. Sometimes so disguised that it looks like an enemy, it is really a friend to us, conducing to our welfare even when we complain of it.

And so with other kinds of hardship. So with all of our suffering, whether it comes in the form of punishment for our conscious violations of the commandments of God, or as the result of our ignorance, or as something which merely happens to us regardless of any action or lack of action on our part. In either case, God intends it to be a blessing to us, and by properly accepting it we can certainly make it so.

When suffering is a punishment for some sin which has been committed, there is no difficulty in perceiving its beneficent purpose, especially when the sufferer is some one else than ourselves: for we can then see that it is intended to be corrective in its influence, admonishing the transgressor to repent and reform. If people could sin with impunity, they would keep on sinning eternally. But God is too good to allow them to do so. And He has therefore ordained that as they sow they shall reap—tribulation and anguish, sooner or later, on every soul that doeth evil. That is a highly merciful and beneficent law. Such suffering is a blessing to those who deserve it, like the great famine which came to the prodigal son. They may rebel against it for a

while, but eventually, like the prodigal, they will come to their senses and do that which is right in the sight of the Lord. Thank God for such suffering, however severe it may be. Thank God that, when it is necessary, He administers such bitter medicine to counteract the workings of the virus of sin.

But a large part of people's sufferings is not because of their sins. A great deal of it is owing not to their sinfulness, but to their ignorance; and it sometimes seems very strange that they must suffer as they do, merely because of the innocent mistakes which they make. But how else will they ever learn to avoid such mistakes? If they never suffered for their mistakes, they would never correct them. Such suffering is educational. It trains them into intelligence and the right conduct of life. A burnt child dreads the fire; and a large part of the practical wisdom of the whole human race has been obtained in that way, which was the only possible way. It has been learned in the school of sad experience; and notwithstanding its sadness, we are all wiser and richer and happier because of it.

And so in regard to the sufferings which sometimes befall us not because of our mistakes, nor because of our sins, but from causes for which we are in no way responsible, or even on account of our virtuous deeds. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," says the Bible; and the experience of every generation confirms it. He who honestly tries to live a virtuous life is liable to have various afflictions, as Job had—loss of property, loss of health, loss of friends, and persecution by wicked people whose purposes he contravenes. Such sufferings are especially hard to reconcile with the goodness and wisdom and justice of God; but, nevertheless, we shall eventually see that they have

served a highly useful and beneficent purpose. Like Job, we have only to wait for God's time, and out of the darkness which now envelops us in regard to such sufferings a glorious light will appear, either in the life which now is or in that which is to come.

Already, we can easily see that many people have been benefited in that way. History abounds in illustrations of the blessings which have been occasioned by unmerited sufferings.

When Joseph, being hated by his envious brethren, was sold by them into slavery, it seemed to be an injustice from which no good could proceed. But in subsequent years, when his slavery had led to his political promotion and he had become the prime minister of Pharaoh's domain, he could see that what had seemed to be an awful misfortune had really been a blessing to him; and he therefore said to his guilty brethren, when they feared that he was about to take vengeance upon them, "Fear not. As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good."

If Walter Scott had not met with financial misfortune, he would never have written the Waverly novels and become one of the world's most illustrious authors. If John Bunyan had not been unjustly imprisoned, he would never have produced "The Pilgrim's Progress." If John Murray had not been so greatly afflicted that he fled from his native land to hide himself in a wilderness, he would never have founded the Universalist Church in this country.

And, to pass on from all other illustrations to the greatest one, if Jesus Christ had not been crucified, He would never have become the world's Redeemer. He knew that His undeserved afflictions were among the indispensable means by which He will draw all man-

kind to Himself; and so, although He prayed in His terrible agony that, if possible, the cup might pass away from Him, He trustfully said, "Thy will be done," and, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and took His place at the right hand of his Father on high. We are told that "he was made perfect through sufferings," and that "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and, being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

Being made perfect—ah, that is the meaning of all of our sufferings. They are divinely intended for our spiritual benefit, and in the end they will serve the purpose for which God has permitted them. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and "although no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." The way in which it profits us is set forth in the statement that "tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed"; or, according to a better rendering, "tribulation produces endurance; and endurance approval; and approval hope; and hope will not be disappointed."

If we had no crosses to bear, where would our strength of character be? How should we develop any fortitude? It is endurance of hardships that strengthens the soul. It is that which produces God's approval, self-approval, and the approval of one's fellowmen. And the experience which is so acquired gives its possessor a larger spiritual and intellectual outlook, lifting his thoughts and expectations above temporal

things, and inspiring him with an assurance of heavenly things.

We see, therefore, why it is ordained that mankind shall have suffering; or, if we do not see it now, we shall see it hereafter. We shall see that, as the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more exceedingly, He will finally bless every one who endures affliction, by making it redound to his welfare and happiness.

And, furthermore, we shall see why He permits the existence of evil. The question is often asked why, if God is omnipotent, He allows the existence of wickedness; and why, if it is due to a personal devil, He does not either destroy or disable the devil. And if evil and its dire consequences were to endure forever, there would be no answer to that question without dishonouring God. But while the problem of evil, in the present state of our intelligence, is not entirely clear to us, it is not wholly inscrutable; and the story of Job throws considerable light on it. For, according to that story, God Himself permitted Satan to afflict Job and to tempt him; and although Satan's motive was entirely blameworthy, he served a righteous purpose, so far as God was concerned. He assisted God to bless Job more abundantly than before. And so it will be with all evil. The very spirit of evil, which is personified as the devil, is always subject to God's control, and, in spite of its wickedness, must serve His purpose of wisdom and love in the end. Goethe names it Mephistopheles, and calls it

*"A portion of that power
Which wills the bad and works the good at every hour."*

Longfellow calls it Lucifer, and says of it, in "The Golden Legend,"

*"It is Lucifer,
The son of mystery;
And since God suffers him to be,
He too is God's minister,
And labours for some good
By us not understood."*

Both of those poets hark back to the book of Job for their conception of the usefulness of the spirit of evil and of the reason why it is permitted to exist in the world. It does not justify evil, but it does justify God in permitting its existence as a means of educating and developing the souls of mankind. When it has fully served His purpose it will come to an end. No devil can ever separate us from our heavenly Father's love and care. Neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, can ever separate us from it or defeat His purpose concerning us. The death of our material bodies, which many people regard as a terrible evil, will itself be a wonderful blessing to us as an introduction to the unspeakably glorious experiences of an endless life beyond the grave. Sometime we shall all thank God for it, and for all of the hardships which we have had to endure on this side of the grave. In the meantime, let us accept them in a spirit of trustfulness, and wait for the revelation which will come by-and-by.

*"A little while, 'mid shadow and illusion,
To strive by faith love's mysteries to spell;
Then read each dark enigma's bright solution,
Then hail sight's verdict,—He doth all things well."*

XIV

ABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

"The kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every one according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."—MATT. 25: 14, 15.

THE parable from which these words are taken was spoken by Jesus to His little company of disciples a few days before His crucifixion. They were spoken with reference to His approaching departure, and the duty which would then devolve upon them of being faithful to the great work which He would leave in their care. He Himself was the man who was going to another country, and His disciples were the servants to whom He delivered His goods—the good tidings which we call the gospel, the great truths and sublime principles of the Christian religion, concerning which He said to them, just before His ascension, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It was the duty of every one of them to execute that commission to the best of his ability, whatever the extent of his qualifications might be.

But while that was the primary meaning of the parable, its application was not limited to its original hearers. It has a wider application, as wide as mankind.

For, in the first place, nothing is more evident than the differences of ability which exist among men. In that respect, the difference among the three servants who are mentioned in the parable were typical of the difference among people in general. Never since the world began have all men been equally endowed with ability—notwithstanding the statement of our Declaration of Independence, that “all men are created free and equal.” They are not created equal in respect to ability, but conspicuously unequal. By nature and by circumstances they are very differently endowed. They are not equally talented.

One person is born with a natural aptitude for great undertakings and corresponding achievements: he has the inherent ability, and his circumstances are all favourable to the exercise of it. He is the man with five talents—a genius, we say. He seems to be able to do whatsoever he wishes to. The greatest achievements are possible for him; the highest positions are open to him, and he has only to step into them.

Another person is born with an equal natural aptitude, but is handicapped by circumstances which lessen his ability. He is like one of those persons who are mentioned in Gray's *Elegy*—some mute, inglorious Milton or Cromwell, some village Hampden, whose circumstances prevented the glorious achievements which would otherwise have gained the applause of mankind. He is the man with two talents.

Another is born with no such natural aptitude. He is fitted for only a humble position, and his circumstances accord with his natural outfit. Even with his best endeavours, he can do but little in comparison with the others who have been mentioned. He is the man with one talent.

And besides those three classes there are a great many others, of all possible gradations. A scale which would indicate all of the different abilities of mankind would have to be so finely marked that we should need a powerful microscope in order to read it, or so long that we should need a telescope in order to see the further end of it. God alone could perceive all of its countless gradations. He knows the real ability of every one of His children. We know only in part, but we can easily see that some have more ability than others have. The fact is so patent that no one can be blind to it.

As to the cause of the inequality, there are different opinions. A part of it is evidently due to the laws of heredity. Children inherit from their ancestors not only different kinds but different degrees of ability. Every one of us is to a great extent the product of ancestral influences extending back for many ages. We are largely what our progenitors made us to be by their personal characteristics and by the lives which they led. That is a scientific fact of no little importance, especially as the characters of our own descendants will be largely determined by it. If we live irregular, foolish, and sinful lives, they will suffer the consequences; and if any of them, as a result of our folly and sinfulness, are born with feeble constitutions, deficient intelligence, or evil propensities, neither they nor God will be to blame for it. The law of heredity is a good law, and it works for good if we use it lawfully. They who abuse it have themselves alone to blame, and they who suffer from abuse of it on the part of their ancestors should blame only their ancestors.

But while such differences are partly explained by the law of inheritance, that is not the only cause of

them. There are differences which require some other explanation. Children of the same parents, brought up in the same household, sometimes differ in ability as widely as if one of them were the child of a barbarian and the other were a descendant of highly civilized ancestors. Such differences are not explainable by any materialistic theory. Physical science is unable to account for them, and we can only say that the Creator Himself has ordained them. Apparently, He never intended that all mankind should have exactly the same ability, any more than that they should have exactly the same physiognomy. Variety seems to be a part of His plan in regard to us, no less than in regard to the lower orders of creation. He Who has made one beautiful flower to differ from another in shape and in colour, one tree from another in size and in fruitfulness, one animal from another in strength and intelligence, one star from another in brightness and glory, has also made human beings to differ in ability. He has made no provision for a dead level of uniformity among human beings, either as to their ability, or as to their attainments, or as to their acquisition of material things: which is equivalent to saying that He has made no provision for the success of those theorists who advocate such uniformity.

There is no warrant in any of the teachings of Christ for the kind of socialism which desires to make all men alike. They cannot be made alike in ability or attainments. Other things being equal, the man with five talents will always get ahead of the man with but two, and the man with two talents will always get ahead of the man with but one, so far as their respective acquisitions are concerned. That is according to God's law. It is the law of the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus de-

clared. No human law can do away with it. As long as human nature remains as it is, some persons will have more ability than others, and will consequently make greater gains, and sooner or later have greater possessions. If that is unjust, the injustice must continue.

But it is not fundamentally unjust or unwise. No doubt, there is much human injustice connected with the inequalities which exist among men, especially in regard to their worldly possessions. No doubt, some of them have more, and some less, than they ought to have. No doubt, some of them take a selfish advantage of their ability to domineer over weaker persons, oppressing and robbing them. No doubt, there is great need of reform in regard to such matters, and human laws may do much to remove the injustice. Let us do what we can to obtain such laws, and to guarantee to every one a proper recompense for his labour. But let us not complain of the fact that people differ in ability, or that some of them get more than others, as long as they get it by honest methods. That is to complain against Him who created us.

If God required the same attainments or achievements from all men, there might be some justification for complaint and despondency. If He required as much from the man with one talent as from him who has five, the former might have sufficient reason for complaining. But such is really not the case. God requires no more of any person than that person himself has the power to do. He measures every one's responsibility by the ability which he possesses. If I have but one talent, He requires from me, in the way of attainments, only a fifth of what He requires from him who has five. To whom much is given, of him

much is required; and they who are disgruntled at the smallness of their ability should consider that the increase for which they sigh would bring a correspondingly greater responsibility, so that the balance would be exactly the same after all. It was no easier for the man with five talents to do his full duty than for him who had received but two, or than it would have been for the faithless servant who had received only one.

People are apt to ignore this fact, and therefore to envy one another. The poor envy the rich, and the weak envy the strong, for their greater ability. O, they say, if we only had such means as they have, how much easier our work would be, and how much happier our lives would be! And sometimes, on the other hand, the rich and the strong envy the poor and the weak for their smaller responsibility. The rich man, loaded down with cares, and tormented with a multiplicity of vexatious responsibilities, envies the poor man for his freedom from all such anxieties. The strong man who perhaps but yesterday was exulting over his feeble neighbour is today obliged to shoulder a musket and risk his life on the field of battle, while his feeble neighbour is left at home; and now he envies the very weakness which he used to despise. And so goes the world—one envying another for his greater ability, or for his lesser liability; whereas, if they would duly consider the matter, both of them would see that there is no justification for envy on either side. God treats all of us impartially in the duties which He lays upon us, asking no more and no less of any person than He has given him power to bear and perform.

And He also treats all alike in the final reward which He gives to them if they do their duty equally well. According to the parable, the man of two talents who

had gained other two received precisely the same reward as the man of five talents who had gained other five; and if the man of but one talent had made a good use of it, he would also have received the same reward. To him, as to each of the others, his lord would have said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." He would have had the same recompense, the same heavenly blessedness. And so it will surely be with every one who is faithful to what is required of him. God is not a hard master, reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strewed. He gives us the ability to do what He requires of us; and when we do it, He rewards us exceedingly abundantly, especially when we do it as servants of Christ.

Every person who is faithful to the teachings of Christ in the use which he makes of his personal possessions is rewarded with the kind of joy for the sake of which Jesus endured the cross, and to which He referred when He said to His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

The joy of Jesus Christ was the kind of joy which always comes from a sense of faithfulness, from a consciousness of God's approval, and from a realization that by means of one's labours other people have been benefited and the perfect coming of God's Kingdom on earth has been hastened.

Is there any greater joy than that? Is there any other to compare with it? Do we not all know, as a matter of experience, that our noblest and most abiding joy has come from what we have done for others rather than from what we have done for ourselves, from what we have given rather than from what we

have received, from the sacrifices which we have made in the cause of righteousness and humanity rather than from the promotion of our personal comfort?

Temporarily, we may seem to get more enjoyment from selfishness than from unselfishness, from receiving than from giving, from pandering to our worldly impulses than from seeking for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. But, in fact, we do not; and, in the long run, our own experience contradicts such an assumption. The pleasure which we obtain by what we expend for ourselves quickly passes away; but that which comes as the result of our benefactions to others never passes away. We are both better and happier for it as long as we live. It is a heavenly treasure, which death itself cannot destroy.

If, then, you would have the noblest and most abiding of joys, regard yourself as one of the servants of Christ, and your possessions as talents to be faithfully used in the work of His Kingdom. Imitate his unselfishness, His devotion to the cause of true religion and humanity. Remember that your responsibility corresponds with your ability, and, whether you are greatly or only moderately gifted, be absolutely faithful. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it," like the servants at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, and His joy will remain in you, and your joy will be full.

XV

TRANSFORMATION BY CONTEMPLATION

"We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."—II COR. 3: 18.

AMONG Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories there is one which is called "The Great Stone Face." It was probably suggested by the rocky formation which is known as the Profile among the White Mountains, for it relates to a similar work of Nature—a wonderful mass of rocks closely resembling a human countenance, far up on the precipitous side of a mountain, overlooking a fertile and beautiful valley inhabited by many people. According to the story, the expression of the Face was very noble and benevolent, "as if it were the glow of a vast warm heart that embraced all mankind in its affections"; and there was a tradition in the valley that a child would sometime be born there who would grow up into the likeness of that wonderful image and be the greatest and most beneficent man of his time.

Among those who devoutly believed the tradition, and who hoped for its fulfilment within their own lifetime, was a boy by the name of Ernest, who had learned it at his mother's knee. He lived in full view of the Great Stone Face; and whenever he beheld its majestic outlines he thought of the story which his mother had told him, and wished that the great, good man would come. Often, when the toil of the day was over, he

would sit gazing at the Face as the sunset illumined it, and would imagine that it smiled upon him. And so, year after year, as he grew up to manhood, he loved that Face more and more, and was filled with an ardent longing for the coming of the benefactor whose own face would resemble it.

After a while it became rumored that such a man had appeared—a man by the name of Mr. Gathergold. He had been born in the valley, and had recently returned to it from a far distant city where he had somehow accumulated a great deal of money. But when Ernest beheld him, he immediately saw that the people were mistaken concerning him, because there was no resemblance between him and the Face. They only imagined that he resembled it, because the glamour of his money temporarily blinded them; and by-and-by they also perceived that there was no similarity, because, instead of spending his great wealth as a public benefactor, he spent it for himself alone; and so the glamour passed away.

A few years afterwards, there came to the valley a military hero, and then a great statesman, and then a great poet, each of whom had been born there, and concerning each of whom it was said for a while that he resembled the Face and was surely the benefactor whom the people had been waiting for. But in each case the illusion wore off as before; and the people still waited; and Ernest still gazed at the Face, day by day, and went about his humble duties, and did whatever good he could, till he became an old man and was known far and wide for his goodness and wisdom, so that people often went to him for advice, and for comfort, and for an explanation of the New Testament, which he somehow made plainer to them than any one

else. And one evening, as the sun was setting, while he was thus talking at an out-of-doors meeting in a place where the Great Stone Face was visible, the people all at once perceived that in him the ancient prophecy had found its fulfilment; for both his features and his expression exactly resembled those of the Face far above them. Little by little, without being aware of it, ever since his childhood's days, he had been taking on a physical likeness to the Face which he had so long and so lovingly looked upon, while his character had become imbued with the traits which it symbolized.

When Hawthorne wrote that charming story, he may not have been thinking of any part of the Bible; but if he had intended to write a story which would illustrate the great truth which is set forth in my text, he could not have done it more successfully. For as Ernest, according to the story, gradually came to resemble the Great Stone Face by habitually beholding it and considering its significance and conforming his conduct to the character which it symbolized, so, according to my text, the disciples of Jesus Christ are transformed into His likeness by fixing their thoughts and affections on the glory of His character and trying to live in conformity with it. The story is based on the same principle which the apostle sets forth, and the principle is a true one. It is not a mere poetic fancy. There is nothing more real, or more practical, or more generally observable; for it is a principle whose applications are very numerous and various—the principle of transformation by beholding and reflecting.

Human nature, in fact, is remarkably plastic. It can be moulded by its associations, for good or for ill. All of us are being moulded for better or worse, whether we know it or not, every day that we live, by

the influence of the sort of things to which we give our attention; and especially so if we regard them with favour. Even if we regard them with aversion, there may be a tendency for us to be influenced by them. Things which we originally dislike may become so familiar to us that, unless we are very careful, we shall cease to dislike them and shall be assimilated to them.

*"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."*

But we are especially susceptible to the influence of those things which we habitually regard with a favourable feeling. It is by them that we are most easily and rapidly moulded.

That is true, to some extent, of our physical features. Our countenances are liable to be changed more or less by the nature of the things which we habitually contemplate. Hawthorne's idea that, in course of time, by gazing as Ernest did on the Great Stone Face, a person would gradually take on a very similar expression, is not so unreasonable as some may suppose. That would probably be the actual effect on some persons who have an exceptionally sensitive nature. It is told of a celebrated caricaturist that he could not draw continuously for more than two hours, because his own features had so strong an inclination to be twisted into the likeness of whatever he was drawing that after a little while his face ached.

Why, even the kind of business in which a man is engaged may gradually change his countenance and cause him to take on a characteristic expression. Who of us has not occasionally met with such instances?

And if people are subject to such physical changes, due to the nature of the things which they contemplate, much more are they likely to acquire mental resemblances. The body changes but slowly. It is made of sluggish materials and can be transformed only as the mind is first influenced and affected. But the mind is more directly and quickly susceptible, and possesses a much greater aptitude to accord with its associations, or, in scientific language, to conform to its environments. And so it often comes to pass, as a matter of common observation, that pupils who are under the same teacher for a number of years come to have the same mental characteristics that he has, the same habits of thought, the same methods of speech, the same general style. They are in danger of imitating his mannerisms. And that is not merely because of the instruction which he gives to them. It is because of his unconscious influence, which tends to assimilate them unto himself. While they are looking to him for instruction they receive something else, which may be of no less importance to them. They receive an impression which may modify their habits of thought for a lifetime and be a powerful factor in shaping their conduct long after they have forgotten nearly all that he said to them.

If you visit the great galleries of paintings in Europe and make a study of their contents, you soon learn to distinguish not only the works of the few supreme masters, but also those of their pupils, belonging to the different schools which were due to their influence. You can soon recognize the work of artists who belonged to the school of Titian, of Corregio, of Murillo, of Rembrandt, of Rubens, or of any of the other great world-famous masters; and you know that the resem-

blance between their works and the works of the masters is owing to the diligence with which they had studied the works of the masters. By steadfastly beholding the glorious artistry of Titian, and reflecting it in their own works to the best of their ability, the members of his school became more and more like him in artistic accomplishments, till some of their pictures could hardly be told from his own. And so in regard to the other great masters. Their genius had a transforming influence, intellectually and æsthetically, on the artists who looked up to them,—an influence which assimilated them unto themselves.

In the moral realm also the same principle holds, and is perhaps even more operative than anywhere else. Indeed, the tendency for people to become good or bad according to the company which they keep, and the character of the things which they contemplate, is so evident as to be proverbial. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Noble associations produce good manners. He who habitually associates with good people, or who takes as his model a person of high character, or who forms for himself a high moral ideal of which he frequently thinks with aspiration and longing, will be assimilated thereto in his own moral character. So too with him who reads good books and who witnesses lofty and sublime exhibitions. While he who keeps immoral company, or who glorifies immoral people, or who amuses himself with disgraceful stories or by witnessing plays of a similar character, cannot fail to be morally injured by it. He will be conformed to the likeness of what he thus contemplates, reflecting it more and more in his own moral character.

Therein is one of the principal dangers of electing

immoral men to office. It is not merely because they are likely to do immoral things, but because by electing them we exalt their immorality in the sight of the people and practically honour it. Many centuries ago the Athenian orator Æschines admonished his fellow citizens in regard to that matter. "For you know," said he, "it is not music, nor the gymnasium, nor the schools, that mould young men; it is much more the public proclamations, the public examples. If you take one whose life has no high purpose, one who mocks at morals, and crown him in the theatre, every boy who sees it is corrupted. Beware, therefore, Athenians; remember that the character of a city is determined by the character of the men whom it crowns." That is good advice for these days—as good for the people of this country in the twentieth century as for the inhabitants of Athens before the advent of Christ.

Human nature is imitative; it is likely to assume a likeness to what it admires and glorifies. And if we ourselves would be noble, if we would progress towards perfection and come at last to the full development of our divine possibilities, it behooves us to look at noble things, letting our thoughts dwell upon noble ideals, and contemplating things of an elevating character; and most of all it behooves us to study the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, looking steadfastly unto Him as the model of perfection and trying to reflect His spirit in our dealings with our fellowmen. There is nothing else so ennobling as such communion with Him. That is confessed by the ablest of those who refuse to admit His divinity. Renan has declared that "in Jesus was condensed all that is good and elevated in our nature"; and John Stuart Mill is responsible for the statement that "even now it would not be easy,

even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life." Most assuredly it would not; and for those who are not unbelievers the habit of fixing the mind's eye on His life and His teachings has a salutary effect which is beyond computation.

That is one of the reasons why every one who can do so should attend church every Sunday—not merely to hear a sermon, but to look unto Jesus and to consider the glory of His life and His teachings. It would not be far from true to say that the principal value of any church service is in the opportunity which it gives for beholding Christ's glory, and for being thereby changed into a closer resemblance to Him. No matter whether the sermon is a great or a small one; no matter whether it conveys any new information or simply tells the old truths which you have heard from your childhood; if it holds up Jesus Christ to you and helps you to behold His glory, or if the entire service does so, it is exceedingly valuable, and you should avail yourself of it.

We need at least one day of the week for especially turning our thoughts towards Christ, and towards all that His glorious ministry signifies. The world has six days of the seven in which to fashion us. Thank God for the seventh one, with its blessed opportunity of looking away from earthly to heavenly things, from the things that are seen to the things that are unseen, from the imperfections of mankind to the perfection of Christ. God help us all to become more like Him, day by day, as the years go by,

*"Like the stained web which whitens in the sun,
Made pure by being purely shone upon."*

XVI

THE HOUSE OF GOD

"This is none other, but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."—GEN. 28: 17.

IN his poem which is entitled "An Essay on Man," Pope portrays

*"The poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears Him in the wind";*

and what is thus poetically said of the Indian is true of the uncivilized races in general. Knowing nothing of modern science, they have very crude ideas of God and of His relation to the forces of the material universe. They believe that somehow this world is the abode of Divinity, that Nature is the abode of the supernatural, and that behind all of its manifold visible forms there is something personal and invisible which is worthy of worship.

That seems to have been the primitive belief of mankind, out of which their various mythologies grew. They had not risen to a belief in the unity of God, but they believed that in each of the conspicuous aspects of Nature there was a personal element; so that whether they looked at the stars, or the clouds, or the mountains, or the meadows, or the rivers, or the sea, or the forest, or the flowers, they beheld the dwelling place or the agency of some special divinity whom it behooved them to acknowledge, respect, and adore.

We have done away with all that. No faith have we

in Dryads and Naiads and fairies, in Jupiter or Minerva or Juno or Neptune. We glibly explain the phenomena of Nature, not as due to the activities of different divinities, but as the resultant of certain great natural forces, in accordance with certain great natural laws. We are wiser than the people of primitive times. We have outgrown their mythologies, and have none of our own. We know that Nature is more complicated than they supposed it to be, and we take a scientific view of it. We know that this world is only a very small part of the universe, by whose stupendous forces it is carried along as a grain of sand is carried along by a simoon or a cyclone; and we are familiar with the working of such great natural causes as the attraction of gravitation, and chemical affinity, and the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest.

And by as much as Nature has become larger and more complicated to their intelligence, and the reign of law has become more evident, it has become harder for some people to believe in God's nearness to them, or even in His existence as a personal Being. They are prone to think of Him as being only afar off, if He is anywhere, or as being only an abstraction, or a personification of great natural principles, or a philosophical term of no practical consequence. That He is really a personal Being, inhabiting this world and controlling its phenomena, does not easily accord with their habit of thought. They regard that belief as outgrown and untenable, belonging properly enough to the infancy of the race, but not suited to full grown intellectual manhood.

But, notwithstanding everything that modern science has revealed to us, there is no good reason for not believing as firmly as ever not only in the personality but

in the nearness of God. On the contrary we now have additional reason for believing that He is a personal, intelligent Being, and that, as the apostle said to the Athenians, "He is not far from any one of us."

Of course, we cannot believe that His presence is confined to this world, or that His dwelling is in the sky only a few miles away, or that He has a bodily form, or that He manages the forces of the visible universe as a master mechanic manages the machinery of a factory. We cannot go back to the ancient mythology, or to such conceptions of Deity as were held and are still held by uncivilized people. But while we hold fast to our scientific attainments, and to the vastly larger conception of God which they necessitate, we can believe all the more reasonably in His personal character and His spiritual activity in all parts of the universe. We can believe in His immanence—that He is everywhere present, the indwelling life and soul of the material universe—and that, wherever His children are, He is especially present and active with His love and His helpfulness, as a mother is more present, so far as her heart is concerned, in the nursery where her children are than in any other part of a magnificent mansion. The importance of a room does not depend on its size, nor does the importance of a world, in the Lord's estimation. So far as His existence is concerned, He is present in this world the same as everywhere else; and so far as His affection and providential care are concerned, He is much nearer to us than to any uninhabited part of the universe.

There was truth in the primitive belief of mankind that this world is the abode of Deity; and Jacob was right when, awaking on the hill-top at Bethel, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.

'This is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.'" It was really the house of God; for the entire world belongs to Him, and He inhabits every portion of it. It is only one of the rooms, and a comparatively small one, in our Father's house of many mansions; but it is actually one of them and a very important one. Let us never forget that precious truth nor suffer ourselves to be blinded to it by any scientific reasoning. It were a pity if in that respect we should allow the poor Indian or our primitive ancestors to have so great an advantage over us. If we were to sacrifice either, it would be a great deal better for us to sacrifice our boasted science than to sacrifice our Christian faith in the existence and personality and nearness of God. For we need our faith in God even more than our science; and only as we interpret the facts of science by means of such faith can we understand their deepest meaning and their real relation to one another, or make the best and highest use of them. We need our faith in order to account in a rational manner for the wonderful phenomena which Nature presents to us.

A person who should visit the Windsor Castle in England, without knowing its history or ever having examined any similar structure, might be puzzled by a great many of the things which he would see there—by the vast extent of the palace and its numerous annexes, by the number of its rooms, by the length of its galleries, by its walls and its towers, by the splendour of its furnishings, and by the multitude of its portraits and magnificent paintings—as he was led along through the apartments of the wonderful edifice. He would be constantly saying, What meaneth this? But let him come to the throne room, and be told that the whole

stupendous structure was built for the British sovereign several centuries ago, and that it has been the residence of such a personage from then until now, and he will no longer be puzzled by its extensiveness or its furnishings. He will have the key to the mystery; and, while he will still admire, he will no longer be bewildered by it. And precisely so when we realize that this wonderful world, instead of being the result of chance, or of blind force undirected by any intelligence, is the abode of Divinity, created and inhabited by the Ruler of all things. If it is really the house of God, that explains its phenomena; and with that fact to enlighten us we can see a higher meaning in them, a profounder and tenderer and more sacred significance, than any scientist can discern without that fact to enlighten him.

To begin with, it explains the marvelous order which exists in the universe, extending throughout the entire domain from the least to the greatest of all things that we see. Nothing is outside of the control of some law; and the laws of Nature always harmonize. They never conflict with one another, but work with perfect regularity and in perfect accord,—which is exactly what we might expect if this world is the abode of God. If God is immanent in Nature, the soul of all of its phenomena, of course everything will be done in an orderly way, and of course there will be a reign of law; for God is not the author of confusion, but of harmony and regularity and progress and peace. When, therefore, the scientist calls our attention to such regularity, he helps us to believe in the presence of God. When my attention is called to such marvelous order, I say to myself, surely the Lord is in this place, for only He could create and maintain such a system.

Or consider the wonderful variety which exists in

the world—no two landscapes just alike, no two animals just alike, no two flowers, no two faces. If a human artist tries to depict many different faces, unless he copies actual faces, he will be likely to find it very difficult to give a distinctive form and expression to each of them. But Nature knows no such difficulty. There is infinite diversity, in the clouds, in the sunsets, in the trees, in the flowers, in the birds, in the insects, in humanity, in everything. Whence comes it unless God is here? If this is indeed the house of God, whose resources are infinite, that explains the variety. It is exactly what might be expected in the house of such a one as He.

And so with the marvelous perfection, extending to even the slightest details, which is exhibited in the scales of an insect's wing no less than in the mighty orbits wherein the planets keep their courses. No man can make a perfect thing, but Nature is full of perfect things. We think it a wonder, and so it is, if with the aid of a microscope a man engraves the Lord's prayer on the head of a pin; but in the eye of an insect, with its numerous facets, hundreds of beautiful pictures are simultaneously imprinted, each of them accurately representing what the insect beholds. Surely this is the house of God, for no one else can accomplish such wonderful things.

Or how else shall we account for the evidences of design with which Nature abounds—for the wonderful adaptation of different things to each other, and the arrangements for perpetuating the various species?

In his interesting books on the life and habits of insects, the French scientist Fabre has described the evidences of intelligence and of wonderful planning for the future by which some of them provide for the life

of their offspring—telling what seems to be an almost incredible story in regard to what their instinct impels them to do; and he rightly attributes it not to any blind impulse, nor to any merely natural process of development from unintelligent protoplasm, but to the mind of their Creator, Who gives them what we call their instinct as a means of carrying out His own purpose concerning them. The story of insect life and of what we call instinct in the animal world bears exceedingly instructive testimony to the fact that this world is the house of God, and that He is not very far away from any of us.

Consider also the fertilization of flowers. By what nicely adjusted arrangements that result is produced—the pollen being carried from the stamens to the pistils sometimes by the force of the wind, sometimes by the force of gravity, and sometimes by the insects which go from flower to flower in search of the honey which the flowers contain! In obtaining the honey the insects deposit the pollen; and, to secure that result, not only some of the flowers but also some of the insects are constructed in very remarkable ways—the curious formation of some of the insects being exactly adapted to that of the flowers in order that each may survive. If devised by human beings the different arrangements for that purpose would indicate great intelligence.

And so with the different arrangements for the distribution of seeds—some of them being distributed by the wind, some by the streams, some by the birds, some by the squirrels, some by the forcible explosion of seed pods, and some by various other agencies.

John Burroughs, in one of his interesting essays, has called attention to the fact that after a dandelion has blossomed it lowers itself and lies close to the

ground while its seeds are maturing, but that as soon as they are matured it raises its head above the grass, no matter how high the grass may grow, in order that the wind may strike it and scatter the seeds. He calls it "a curious instance of foresight in a weed." Nature is full of such foresight, such evidences of intelligence, such adaptation of means to ends. But to whom, or to what, does the intelligence belong? Has the weed a mind of its own? Has it the power of reasoning? Or is it simply the instrument of a higher intelligence, which inhabits this world and controls its phenomena? Surely, such remarkable adjustments are not the result of blind chance, and they are not self-created. If this world is God's house, that explains all such things.

Verily, it is the house of God; and the more carefully we examine it, and look into its mysteries, and discover the laws and principles which underlie its phenomena, the more we shall be impressed with a consciousness of God's presence, unless something has interfered with our spiritual perceptiveness; and the more devout we shall feel when we think what a wonderful world we live in; and the longer we live in it, if we live as we ought to live, the more we shall find it to be a doorway to the Kingdom of heaven.

May God help us to realize His continual nearness! May He speak to us day by day, as He spoke to Jesus of Nazareth, through the flowers of the field, and the birds of the air, and the winds, and the trees, and all of Nature's forms and forces. And while we thus commune with Him, may we grow into His likeness, till, leaving these earthly scenes behind us, we enter our eternal home.

XVII

THE BOW IN THE CLOUD

“And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.”—GEN. 9: 12-15.

THE primitive human being was both childlike and poetical. He was not much of a scientist. Having no telescopes or microscopes or colleges or libraries, he interpreted the facts of nature according to his own feelings and intuitions and theories. Hence the myths and the legends which have come down to us from antiquity, including this beautiful story in regard to the rainbow.

We, living in the twentieth century, of course know a great deal which the early Hebrews did not know. We know that rainbows must have existed as long ago as there were raindrops and vapour and sunlight, and we can give a strictly natural explanation of their origin. But the early Hebrews could not; and so they regarded the rainbow as a special creation, made for the first time at the cessation of a great flood which had occurred long ago, to be the token of a covenant between God and mankind that there should never be such an awful occurrence again. They assumed that He had created it as a reminder, both for Himself and

for them, of a blessed promise which He had then made in regard to that matter.

Childlike, poetical, unscientific! Undoubtedly so; but profoundly religious, and beautifully significant of a great spiritual truth to which we ought to give heed.

For while we cannot now believe that the rainbow is a special token that God will never allow another flood to occur, or that He needs anything to remind Him of His covenants or His promises, it is true that He has made a blessed covenant with mankind, and that He has given us certain precious promises of which a rainbow, spanning the cloudy sky, is an exceedingly beautiful and appropriate symbol.

Not every material cloud is accompanied by a rainbow; but together with every moral or spiritual cloud there is that which a rainbow symbolizes. Every such cloud has its bow of promise, its divinely appointed token of mercy and blessedness.

Consider, to begin with, that sort of a cloud which settles down by degrees over every one who outlives early manhood or womanhood—the cloud of advancing years and approaching old age—the cloud of which the author of *Ecclesiastes* has said, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come, and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; or ever the sun and the moon and the stars be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain.”

Some of you are already aware of that cloudiness. You have outlived the vigour and the pleasures of youth. You are not as sprightly as you were. Your muscles are not as elastic and firm as they used to be. You cannot run as fast, and you get tired more easily. Your appetite and your digestion are not quite as reli-

able, and you have to be more careful in regard to your food. Perhaps your sight or your hearing is somewhat impaired, and possibly you have not as many teeth as you used to have. You no longer take pleasure in baseball or football or skating or dancing, and there are ever so many things which young people enjoy into the enjoyment of which you no longer can enter. The morning of your life has passed. The afternoon, or possibly the evening, has come, with its shadows, its burdens, its deprivations, its sorrows, its memories of other days whose brightness can return no more. Your life will henceforth be clouded over so far as the special pleasures of that period are concerned; and, indeed, even your memory of a great deal which you once knew and enjoyed is now exceedingly dim or quite hidden from view. In the depths of your subconsciousness it may still be preserved; but, so far as your consciousness is concerned, it is under a cloud.

Well, what of that? Shall we spend the latter part of our lives in lamenting that the pleasures of youth pass away? Shall we sit down under the cloud and complainingly bemoan ourselves, as Elijah sat down under the juniper tree? Shall we not rather look for the bow in that cloud, and rejoice in the compensation which it presents to our view? As Wordsworth says,

*“What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now forever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower?
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which, having been, must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring*

*Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind."*

Ah, yes; for the vanishing pleasures of youth there is more than compensation in the experience, the wisdom, the intellectual strength, and the spiritual joys of mature manhood and womanhood. The happiness of childhood and the physical vigour of early manhood and womanhood are not to be compared in value with the qualities which supersede them as they pass under the cloud. Without a cloud, there could be no rainbow. Without the vanishing of youth and the over-casting of life with the cares and responsibilities of manhood and womanhood, there could be none of those deeper and more satisfying experiences with which we are enriched as the years pass away.

And then there comes another cloud, to which we give the name of death. O, what a dark, dark cloud it is to millions of the human race! Into it, one by one, go our neighbours and acquaintances, our friends and some of those whom we have loved the most tenderly. It envelops them, and in this world we shall see them no more. And presently we ourselves, one by one, shall go into it, and the places that have known us will know us no more. But what a radiant bow of promise now gleams athwart that cloud of death! And what an unspeakably glorious covenant our heavenly Father has made with us concerning it! In the light that now shines from the life and the teachings and the death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ we see that the death of our physical bodies leads directly to the birth of our spiritual bodies, and to our entrance into a world far superior to this one, where we shall

find all of the loved ones whom we have lost for a while. The cloud of mortality is overarched and illumined by the promise of immortality—that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,” and that in our Father’s house of many mansions we shall be with them forevermore. Looking on that blessed promise, and considering that heavenly covenant, we can encounter death in a fearless spirit, and say, even while our tears are falling, “O, grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” No cloud, no rainbow. No physical death, no resurrection into the spiritual life of the heavenly world. In the providence of God one leads to the other, and is the necessary condition on which it depends.

Furthermore, as we journey onward in our earthly career, leaving behind us the pleasures which are peculiar to youth, not only do we suffer the loss of such pleasures, and the temporary loss of the loved ones who go from us, but we suffer in many other ways. Every person’s life on earth is more or less clouded with adversity and suffering. For, as the Bible declares, “although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.” And a great deal of the affliction is apparently unmerited. The people who perforce endure it have done nothing, so far as they know, to deserve it.

Ofttimes, like a sudden tornado or rain-storm, without warning or any evident justification, it arises and beclouds their lives; sometimes in consequence of what we call accidents, sometimes through some mere inadvertence on their part, sometimes through the mistakes or the folly of others, and sometimes for no

manifest reason at all. Innocent people suffer for the transgressions of others. Little children sometimes suffer before they are old enough to know how to take means to protect themselves. Sickness, poverty, loss of fortune, business perplexities, family troubles, defection of friends, persecution by enemies, disappointments and trials and tribulations of all sorts, are constantly beclouding men's lives in this world; and they cry out against it. Why must our lives be so darkened? they say. Why must we be so afflicted, so storm-beaten? What have we done to deserve such adversity? And the only satisfactory answer is, You are suffering in accordance with the loving purpose of God, Whose thoughts and ways are higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth, and Who never afflicts any one, or allows him to be afflicted, excepting with a view to his ultimate welfare, which is included in the ultimate welfare of all.

The Bible says that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and that "though no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." It says that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"; that Jesus Himself was "made perfect through suffering"; and that "if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together." That is the resplendent bow of promise spanning the dark cloud of human suffering; and while it does not explain the whole problem of suffering, it sufficiently explains it, in a general way, to enable us to believe that no suffering is useless. Sometimes and somewhere, when we know as we are known, we shall realize that all suffer-

ing, the suffering of the innocent as well as that of the guilty, has been permitted by the Almighty for the highest good of mankind. Then we shall be able to read understandingly what some one has called its hieroglyphic significance, its mysteriously sacred meaning. In the meantime, let us look on the bow of promise, and trust in the Lord.

And, finally, even when we behold, as we cannot avoid beholding, that cloud which of all clouds is the darkest and most mysterious, the awful cloud of human sin, let us also look rejoicingly on the bow of God's heavenly promise concerning it. For while there is no excuse for sin so far as the sinner himself is concerned, and while they who sin must suffer for it, the Bible distinctly teaches that its permission by the Creator is for an entirely wise and beneficent purpose.

In the first place, it evidently serves as a means of revealing His love to us, and of revealing it more fully than would otherwise be possible. For if mankind never sinned, He could never forgive them; and if He never forgave them, they could never know that He loved them enough to forgive them. How could the prodigal son ever have known the full extent of his father's great love for him unless he had truthfully said to him, "I have sinned against thee"? His sinfulness was the dark foil against which his father's love for him shone forth in resplendent strength and beauty. And even so, the Bible says, "God commendeth His love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"; and, again, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." He could not have so revealed His love to us unless there had been something for Him to forgive in regard to us. As a

ray of sunlight is made visible by the dust in the atmosphere, God's love for us is revealed by its relation to our sinfulness. That is certainly one of the reasons why He has made us liable to temptation and sinfulness. As the Bible declares, He "hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all."

And, more than that, under His loving government, our liability to sinfulness will be a means of promoting our highest good in the end. Otherwise, He would certainly not have permitted it. He would not have made us subject to what the Bible calls vanity unless He had known beforehand that He could deliver us out of it into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He knew, when He created us, that He could make the wrath of man to praise Him, and that the remainder of wrath He would be able to restrain. He knew, when He permitted it, that He could finally make an end of sin and bring in everlasting righteousness, and that He could utilize even our sinfulness to that end, from evil "still educing good, and better thence, in infinite progression." He is doing it even now. He is educating and training us and making us morally stronger than we should otherwise be, by the necessity which we are under to face the existence of evil and to enter into conflict with it.

If there were no evil to contend against, there would be nothing to develop our virtuous qualities, our obedience, fidelity, moral courage, and heroism. And, sinful though it is for us to yield to temptation, it is better for us than never to know what it is to be tempted.

Best of all would it be for us to imitate that perfect One Who, although He was tempted like as we are, was nevertheless without sin; and sometimes, under His leadership, we shall attain to that eminence. Some-

time in the boundless future, under the influence of His teachings and His divine personality, we shall all come forth victorious from the conflict with evil: for "as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous." Sinful now, like its first progenitor, the whole human race shall at last be holy, even as Jesus Christ is holy. The seed of woman will finally bruise the serpent's head. Evil will have served its purpose in developing man's moral qualities; and, more than conquerors in regard to it by the help of the Saviour, mankind will attain to that glorious liberty for which the creation has been travailing from the beginning till now.

No cloud, no rainbow. No vanishing of youthful pleasures, no deeper joys of mature manhood and womanhood. No physical death, no resurrection. No suffering, no development into spiritual perfectness. No evil, no spiritual victory over it. No temporary subjection to what the Bible calls vanity, no everlasting enthronement as the children of God. It is surely worth while to have the clouds that come over us, for the sake of the wonderful blessings which our heavenly Father brings out of them.

XVIII

MAKING A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY

"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."—MATT. 16:21.

NO intelligent person can carefully study the life of our Saviour without seeing that He acted, during the whole of His ministry, under the steady pressure of a great moral imperative which impelled Him to take just the course that He did. He habitually spoke of Himself as being subject to an authority which He was bound to obey; and, furthermore, as being under the impulsion of a great historical movement which required Him to live and die in a particular way. He said that God had sent Him, that He had come to do the will of God, and that He was fulfilling the teachings of the law and the prophets. When He was only twelve years of age, He said to His anxious mother, when she had found Him in the temple, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" and in the latter part of His life He continually showed, by His speech and His conduct, that He was actuated by the consciousness of a spiritual necessity which would give Him no rest till His task was performed. He spoke of His work as something which it was necessary that He should do, and of His suffering as something which it was necessary that He should endure, even though He prayed to be delivered from some of it.

The necessity was not of such a nature that He could not have escaped from it by refusing to submit to it; but, in that case, He must have submitted to the alternative necessity of being false to His mission and losing the blessedness of being the mediator between God and mankind. His only choice was between the two necessities; and He wisely chose that which His heavenly Father had designed for Him, notwithstanding all of the sacrifice and the pain which it involved.

Towards the end of His life, so driven was He by His arduous labours that He hardly had time enough for eating and sleeping, while He knew that just before Him were Gethsemane and Calvary. But on, and on, and on He went, feeling that He must allow Himself no respite till He had completed the great work for which He came to this world. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" said He. Not till He hung upon the cross, and was about to draw His closing breath, did He feel that the urgency was over, the necessity ended. Then He said, "It is finished," and, commending His spirit into the hands of His Father, was forever released from His pain and His woe. No life was ever lived under a greater pressure or a stronger sense of obligation than that to which the life of Jesus Christ was subjected.

That is one of the reasons why we should take it as an example. For, although we have no such exceptional commission, and no such heavy cross to bear, there is to some extent a parallel between His life and our own in respect to the conditions under which we are here.

In the first place, we are in this world because we have been sent into it by our heavenly Father. We

are here in accordance with His foreordination, His determinate counsel, His creative causation. "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves," and that "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." We are here because He has put us here, and because He had a purpose in putting us here, which purpose it is incumbent on us to fulfil just as certainly as it was incumbent on the Lord Jesus Christ to fulfil the divine purpose for which He came to this world.

And, in the next place, being here in accordance with the purpose of God, we are subject to necessities, which impel us to do some things that we would otherwise not do, and prevent us from doing some things that we otherwise would, occasionally putting us to great inconvenience, and finally requiring us to give up our lives. We hardly begin to be conscious of our existence before we begin to be told what we must do and must not do. Nearly every little child is frequently told by his parents of something which he must either do or not do; and, when he begins to go to school, he is also told by his teachers, "You must" or "You mustn't"; and when he becomes a little older and begins to mingle with society, he finds a host of other things which he either must or must not do, no matter what his inclinations may be in regard to them. He is subject not only to nature's laws, but to the laws of his country, and the customs of society, and the dictates of conscience, and the commandments of religion, and the force of physical circumstances, all saying to him either "You must" or "You mustn't"; and finally comes the commandment, You must walk through the valley of the

shadow of death and depart from this world, never more to return.

Surely, this is a world in which we are subject to a great deal of necessity; it is a world of tremendous forces and imperative conditions, from which there is no escape on this side of the grave. Some of those conditions are very hard to endure. No one finds them wholly easy or altogether agreeable, and the pressure is sometimes fearfully strong and severe.

But what then? Inasmuch as there is no escape from the conditions thus imposed upon us, the only practical question which we have to decide is how we shall conduct ourselves with reference to them; and that is a question of most urgent importance, because upon the answer which any one gives to it his character and his usefulness and his happiness depend.

Three courses may be taken in regard to this matter.

One of those courses is to rebel against the duties and hardships of life. It is to fret and be irritable under the sense of compulsion which is imposed by the conditions of our life in this world. It is to take an attitude of resistance towards the imperativeness of the requirements which we are called to obey. It is to say "I will not," in answer to the great "You must" which pursues us with its dictates from the cradle to the grave, and, in defiance and despite of it, to try to have our own way.

That is the instinctive course of the natural man. It is the way in which most children begin to conduct themselves, and in which they are likely to continue till they are taught not to do so. A baby learns, after a while, that it is of no use to rebel against certain requirements. It learns to submit to them, as a matter of prudence at first, and then as a matter of habit.

And so, by degrees, nearly everybody learns to submit in some matters to the imperativeness of the conditions of his life in this world. But in respect to many other matters the great majority of mankind do not learn to submit. They fret and rebel and kick against the goad all the days of their life. And the inevitable result of it is to make their troubles a great deal worse than they would otherwise be. As the Saviour said to Saul of Tarsus, "It is hard to kick against the goad," and they who take that course take the worst of all courses. It is the cause of more wretchedness than all others combined.

Another course is that of stoically accepting whatever occurs. "What can't be cured must be endured" is the motto of the people who resort to that method. They settle into a sort of fatalism, and grimly let things take their course without trying to direct them in one way or another. And while that is not as bad as to be constantly fretting and chafing and rebelling, it is only somewhat less fatal to a person's progress and happiness. It may enable him to endure his misfortunes without complaining, but it can neither comfort him nor assist him to make the most of his opportunities. Stoicism, at its best, is no better than the lethargy of a captive wild animal, which has learned by experience the uselessness of trying to break out of its cage and the sharpness of the prodding iron which is carried in the keeper's hand. That will do well enough for a beast from the jungle, but not for a being who is made in the image of God.

No, the right course in regard to life's duties and hardships is neither to rebel against them nor simply to accept them in a stoical spirit. It is to meet them as they were met by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to accept

them and utilize them in the spirit that He always showed towards the work that His heavenly Father had sent Him to do. His mission involved vastly more trials and hardships than fall to the lot of the rest of mankind, and He was sometimes strongly tempted to turn away from it and to seek for an easier manner of life. That was the temptation which beset Him in the wilderness, at the very outset of His ministry. But He had put it behind Him, and with a full consciousness of what His decision involved, not only accepted what God had ordained for Him, but put Himself into voluntary and active accord with it, making the will of God His own will, and throwing all of His energy into the accomplishment of the work which His Father had sent Him to do. And so He achieved a most glorious victory; so He made His life sublime; so He became the world's Redeemer and obtained the name that is above every name excepting His Father's; and so He obtained for Himself, moreover, a freedom and a joy of transcendent quality—that freedom which He promised to give to His followers—that joy for the sake of which He endured the cross, and of which He said to His disciples on the night of the last supper, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full.” By renouncing self-will and putting Himself into conformity with the will of His Father, He removed all contradiction between “I must” and “I will,” harmonizing His whole life, and becoming so deeply interested in the work which He was doing that He could truthfully say, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work.” That which would otherwise have been unspeakably disagreeable became a source of strength and joy to Him.

That is the way to live freely and joyfully and successfully. If we put our wills in opposition to God's purpose concerning us, rebelling against the course which His providence marks out for us, we can no more live freely or joyfully or successfully than if we disobey the laws of nature. If we disobey them, they punish us and interfere with our liberty; but if we put ourselves into intelligent and willing accord with them, they relieve us from all feeling of disagreeable compulsion and enable us to accomplish most wonderful things. "Nature is commanded," it has been said, "by obeying her"; and we may reverentially say the same thing of God's providence. It is always at our command if we shape our conduct accordingly. In that case the will of God, instead of hindering us, is a help to us, and the things that would interfere with it are a means of promoting our blessedness. It all depends on how we take them and bear ourselves in regard to them.

Did you ever have the exciting and agreeable experience of shooting a rapid in a birch-bark canoe? You might suppose that in the midst of such a powerful current, interspersed with jagged rocks and boulders, it would be impossible for such a craft to escape from destruction. And so it certainly would if the canoeman tried to paddle against the force of the current, or if he endeavoured to drift with it. But he is not so unskilful. Knowing the force of the current and its dangerous character to those who treat it unskilfully, he also knows how to utilize its swiftness and energy. Instead of hugging the shore, as he approaches the rapid he steers into the swiftest portion of it, and so directs his course that, instead of being injured by it, the canoe is carried onward with accelerated speed till it glides into the placid water that lies smiling below. He commands

the current by obeying it. He makes it minister to his liberty, his progress and his happiness, by wisely keeping himself in accord with its energy. And even so can we do with the current of life, whatsoever the difficulties into which we are borne by it. By rebelling against its imperativeness, we can wreck our usefulness and our happiness; or, by intelligently and willingly putting ourselves into accord with it, and so making a virtue of necessity, we can make it serve our highest welfare.

Making a virtue of necessity is sometimes mentioned sarcastically, as if it were an impossible or a discreditable thing; but, as a matter of fact, it is frequently the only wise course to pursue. For it surely is virtuous so to use the necessities which Providence sends to us as to serve the divine purpose for which they are sent to us. That is what Jesus did. He not only endured privation and suffering, but He did it uncomplainingly, trustfully, triumphantly, in the spirit which said "Thy will be done." That is where His virtue lay; and if we would share in His kingdom, we must have "the same mind in us that was also in him." So shall we walk at liberty in keeping God's precepts, whatever our temporal fortunes may be; and when our course on earth is ended, we can close our eyes in death serenely, not as victims but as victors, passing triumphantly from the life that now is to the higher life that awaits us, where the meaning of all mysteries will be fully revealed.

XIX

AN ANTIDOTE FOR WORRYING

"In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."—PHIL. 4: 5-7 [R. V.].

IT has been truly said that worry, rather than work, is what frequently kills people. While overwork causes the death of some, overworry causes that of a great many more; and even when it stops short of actually killing its victims, it disposes them to various ailments, and prevents them from enjoying life as they otherwise would. And if I simply said worry, instead of overworry, my meaning would be just the same. For while work is very easily distinguished from overwork, there is no real distinction between worry and overworry. All worry is overworry, for we should never worry at all. Even a little of it is bad, and the more of it the worse for anybody.

And yet it is one of the commonest things in the world. The people who never worry at all are very few and far between. Most people worry to some extent, and legion is the name of those who worry a great deal during the most of their lives. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, when they have no actual troubles to worry about, they worry about what may occur in the future, looking forward with foreboding to the possibility of evils of which there is no certainty, instead of acting on the principle that sufficient unto

the day is the evil thereof and trying to get the greatest benefit from whatever occurs.

Oh, the folly of borrowing trouble and then worrying about it, or of even worrying about the troubles that really occur! If we could get rid of the worrying which people do in this world, we could get rid of the greater part of the distress and unhappiness.

By what means to get rid of it, or of even our own part of it, is a vastly important question for us, and the only sufficient answer to it is that which the Christian religion supplies. Jesus gave an answer to it in His sermon on the mount, and the apostle gives an answer to it in the words of my text.

A good deal of our worrying might be avoided if we would duly consider the uselessness of it. "Which of you," said Jesus, "by taking anxious thought, can add one cubit to his stature?" Nobody ever gained anything by worrying, and nobody ever will. If troubles are to come, they will come in spite of our worrying; and if not, why should we make ourselves miserable by thinking about them? We create trouble in that way instead of avoiding it. In fact,

*"There's many a trouble
Would burst like a bubble,
And into the waters of Lethe depart,
Did we not rehearse it,
And tenderly nurse it,
And give it a permanent place in the heart."*

What we need in such cases, as a cure for our worrying, is the use of a little common sense. But, aside from the difficulty of so controlling our thoughts and our feelings, there are many troubles to which that method could not be applied, because they have either

arrived or are sure to come by-and-by. And if we are not to worry about such things, we must have some other resource than a realization of its uselessness. Useless or not, we must worry about them unless we somehow stupefy our sensibilities and our intelligence, or, retaining our sensibilities and our intelligence also, make use of the method which my text sets before us.

That is what the apostle did, and it is also what Jesus did. They had the severest kind of troubles; but, notwithstanding their afflictions and the certainty of the martyrdom which they knew to be awaiting them, they not only refrained from worrying, but were habitually uncomplaining and tranquil and joyful, because they let their thoughts dwell in a thankful and prayerful spirit on the nearness and wisdom and goodness of God. They never tried to drown their troubles. They never tried to run away from them. They never denied their reality or treated them as illusions. But, uncomplainingly accepting them in the spirit of the religion which they believed and proclaimed, they were free from all worriment, and were filled with a blessed peacefulness even when their tribulations were most acute and severe. And if we imitate them in that respect, we shall likewise have the peace that passes all understanding, however numerous and distressing our trials may be.

In the first place, we shall be comforted by the consciousness that our heavenly Father is near to us and that He understands our difficulties.

Who does not know how much harder it is to endure suffering all alone, without any companionship, than in the presence of some one who is friendly and compassionate? Who of us does not remember what comfort he often received, in the troubles of his child-

hood, from knowing that his father or his mother was near and was sympathetically aware of whatever was distressing him? To many a child in a sick-room, or in the darkness of the night, awaking out of troubled dreams, the consciousness of his mother's nearness, even though she is silent, gives such quietness and peacefulness as nothing else could bestow. And, even so, when we realize the nearness of God and let our thoughts dwell on His sympathy and love for us, it gives a feeling of companionship and security and peacefulness which prevents us from worrying as we otherwise would.

Too many of us think of God, when we think of Him at all, as a far-away Being, enthroned in the sky, and interested chiefly in angelic affairs. There is no comfort in that; nor is there any good sense in it. God is not afar off. "Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet." In Him we live and move and have our being; and He knows all about us. Our joys and our sorrows, our successes and our failures, our temptations and dangers and tribulations and sins, and even the innermost thoughts of our hearts, are all fully understood by Him; and while He by no means clears the guilty, He is much more forgiving and loving and sympathetic towards even His most sinful children than any human parent can be. And if, when we are in distress of body, mind, or estate, and are worrying about actual or imaginary ills, we would trustfully think of His nearness and sympathy, it would be a wonderful help to us—as it was to Jesus Christ when He was about to be crucified and He knew that even His disciples would be afraid to remain with Him. "Behold," said He, "the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall all be scattered, every man to his

own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." And, so sustained, He bore His cross without complaining.

None of us is alone. Our heavenly Father, infinitely sympathetic, is with every one of us; and if we would think of that fact when we are having any trouble, it would help to keep us from worrying. The simple consciousness of it would have a powerful tendency to comfort and strengthen us.

And not only is He always with us, but we can enter into communion with Him. We can tell Him our troubles, and ask Him to help us, and so obtain still further relief from our worriments.

Not that He needs to be told of our troubles, but only that we need to tell them to Him. And not that He needs to be asked to assist us, but only that we need to ask Him. For in the very act of thus communing with Him we find relief and strength and peacefulness. There is often great helpfulness in telling one's perplexities even to a human friend, and sometimes even to a stranger if no one else is at hand. Human nature is so constituted that it desires to give expression to its thoughts and its feelings; and there are times when it cannot be at ease without doing so. To keep them locked up in one's breast is to be oppressed by them, and especially so if they are characterized by anxiety. To use a Biblical metaphor, they are like a burning fire shut up in the bones. To tell them to somebody, especially if he sympathizes, relieves the oppression. That is the value of confession for those who have sinned, and of conversation about their troubles for the sad and distressed.

We are told that after John the Baptist was beheaded in prison, his disciples buried the body and then went

and told Jesus. They could have done nothing better as a relief for their woe. And we can do nothing better, when we are in trouble about anything, than to tell it to the heavenly Father whom Jesus has revealed to us. Blessed is the sacred privilege of thus going to His throne of grace and unburdening ourselves by communion with Him. No one ever went in vain. Human beings may refuse to listen to us; or, if they listen, they may do so without any sympathy. But our heavenly Father always sympathizes, and when we tell our troubles to Him we inevitably feel better for it and are more able to bear them. When we pray to Him for the strength and the peace which we need, if we pray in the right spirit, He will answer the prayer.

Never be doubtful as to the reasonableness or the power of prayer. As for its reasonableness, Mr. Huxley, the famous scientist, skeptic though he was, said in a letter to Charles Kingsley, "Not that I mean for a moment to say that prayer is illogical; for if the whole universe is ruled by fixed laws, it is just as logically absurd for me to ask you to answer this letter as to ask the Almighty to alter the weather." The laws which God Himself has made, and to which the entire creation is subject, do not hinder Him from hearing and answering our prayers any more than they hinder a human father from answering the proper requests of his children. If we, being evil, as Jesus said, know how to give good things to those that ask for them, much more will our heavenly Father do so. Away with all doubts and sophistical reasoning in regard to either His power or His willingness to do so. He will as certainly answer our prayers, when we pray in the right spirit, as He will give us a harvest of grain

in the field when we obey the conditions which He Himself has ordained.

Not that He will always give us just the things that we ask for. He is too wise and too just and too loving to do so. But when He does not give us exactly what we have asked for, He gives something that is better for us. Best of all, He imparts to us such a feeling of peacefulness that we can trustfully say, 'Thy will be done.'

Jesus prayed that, if possible, the cup of agony which was awaiting Him might be taken away. It was not taken away; but angels came and comforted Him; and then He went forth from the garden of Gethsemane with a spirit of resignation and calmness and confidence which carried Him triumphantly through to the end.

Paul repeatedly prayed for the removal of what he described as his thorn in the flesh. It was not taken away; but God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee"; and from that time forth, instead of complaining of his infirmities, or worrying about them, he gloried in them as a means of showing the power of Christ.

And so, if we pray in the right spirit, we shall obtain a spiritual blessing, whatever else we may obtain or may not obtain. The peace which passes all understanding will keep our hearts and minds from all distracting anxieties, and we shall be able to meet whatever comes without losing our self-control or giving way to despair.

Let us not lose sight of the proviso, however,—that we pray in the right spirit,—and let us observe what is said about praying with thankfulness. "In everything," says the apostle, 'by prayer and suppli-

cation with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Do not omit the thanksgiving. Be thankful for past and present blessings when you ask God for still further assistance, or you will not be in a condition to receive the peacefulness which He promises. To ask even our fellowmen for favours while we manifest no thankfulness for what we have already received from them is to be unworthy of their kindness; and such an attitude towards God is no less reprehensible.

Every one of us, whatever his troubles may be, has vastly more to be thankful for than he has to complain about. We are indebted to God for our very existence, and for all that makes it valuable. The world in which we live is His, and not a single day goes by in which His loving care is not renewedly shown to us. We are surrounded by its evidences, by day and by night, and wherever we go.

In the quaint old English town of Chester, there stands on one of the principal streets a house which is known as "God's Providence House," because of an inscription which was placed upon the front of it a long time ago. The inscription says, "God's providence is mine inheritance." Many thousands of persons have read that inscription, and every one of them might truly have said to himself, I myself am really living in God's Providence House. For what else is this world? Oh, how richly it is furnished with the tokens of His providence, and how deeply we are indebted for them! And, beyond all material and temporal benefits, what a glorious revelation He has given to us of the things which we shall inherit when we depart from this world!

Ah, yes, we are all living in God's Providence House,

and when we come to the end of our life in this world we shall simply move on into a larger and better one, more richly provided for the needs of our souls.

If, then, you would have the peace which passes all understanding, "in nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

*"Build a little fence of trust
Around today:
Fill the space with loving work,
And therein stay.
Look not through the sheltering bars
Upon tomorrow;
God will help thee bear what comes
Of joy or sorrow."*

XX

THE INHERITANCE OF THE MEEK

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

MATT. 5: 5.

WHEN Jesus gave utterance to this noteworthy statement, it must have amazed and puzzled some of the people who heard it. For it is a part of the sermon on the mount, and from the place where it was spoken they could see a state of affairs which apparently disproved it. They could see the Sea of Galilee, and the flourishing cities that dotted its shores, and a wide stretch of the surrounding country, all owned or controlled or made subject to taxation by the domineering Romans, who had conquered the greater part of the then known world, and whose emperor exalted himself as a god.

The meek to inherit the earth, indeed! Were the Romans meek? Was it meekness that made them covet universal dominion, that raised and equipped their mighty armies, that enabled them to vanquish all other nations and to rule the world almost alone? Was Cæsar a meek man? Was Herod a meek man? Was Pontius Pilate a meek man, or any of the other people who possessed the greater part of the earth and its products? Were they not a class of people who despised meekness and derided it? And had not such people possessed the earth from immemorial times?

Such thoughts must have arisen, it seems to me, in

the minds of some of Jesus' hearers when He declared that the meek should inherit the earth; and they could have credited His statement only by assuming that there would soon be a radical change in the conduct of this world's affairs.

Some of them, it is certain, did make that assumption. They expected a political and economical and social revolution. They supposed that Jesus was about to establish a kingdom which would supersede all other kingdoms, and that, under His dominion, the possession of the earth would be given to His followers, who were to be distinguished not for their political and military qualities, but for their devotion and obedience. That seems to have been what His disciples expected.

But no such revolution occurred during their lifetime, nor has it ever yet occurred, nor is there any likelihood of it. There has been a great improvement, by slow degrees, in the government of this world's affairs, in the distribution of property, and in the relations between different classes of men; and the work of improvement is still going on. But there are no indications that real estate or any kind of worldly property has any stronger tendency now than it had two thousand years ago to come into the possession of meek-minded people. Apparently the tendency, now as then, is for all sorts of worldly property to come into the possession of aggressive, shrewd, and grasping people, the most of whom are, to say the least, no meeker than their poorer neighbours.

Not that a spirit of meekness necessarily prevents an accumulation of property,—although it is certainly inconsistent with the accumulation of such vast fortunes as are nowadays held by certain people, because

of the wrongful methods by which such fortunes are gained. The acquisition of worldly property depends, as a rule, on the exercise of qualities with which meekness either may or may not be associated. He who possesses those acquisitive qualities will be likely to have worldly wealth, whether he possesses a meek disposition or not. Some rich men are meek, and a larger number are not.

The time is coming, let us hope, when all of the good things which this world contains will be in the possession of meek-minded people, because there will be no other people. But that time is still a long way off, and in the meantime the acquisition of worldly property will follow the same law that has always governed it. People will reap as they sow. In the struggle for existence the fittest will survive; and in the struggle for worldly property, it will be obtained, as a rule, by those people who have the best business ability.

What, then, was the Saviour's meaning when He said that the meek shall inherit the earth? It will be clear to us, I think, and will commend itself to us, if we consider, in the first place, what meekness is; and, in the next place, what it is to inherit the earth.

Let us avoid the mistake of confounding meekness with weakness. They are not identical, nor is there any similarity between them. Much harm has been done to the cause of Christianity by the somewhat popular habit of confusing them with each other. The prevalent idea seems to be that a meek person is one with no force of character, a non-resistant, cowardly person, or a time-serving, hypocritical sort of a person, like Uriah Heep in the story of "David Copperfield." That conception of meekness has made it unpopular, and has brought Christianity into reproach

with some people because meekness is one of its special requirements.

That such a conception is entirely erroneous, the Bible shows beyond all dispute. Let us look at the characters of some of the persons to whom it ascribes meekness in the highest degree.

In the Old Testament Moses is held up to us as the greatest example of meekness. "The man Moses," we are told, "was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth." What kind of a man was Moses, then, if judged by his history? Was he lacking in strength or virility of character? Was he a weakling, a mollicoddle, to be pushed aside by manlier men or to be trodden under foot by the proud and the selfish? Whoever thinks so should read the story of his remarkable life.

Behold him—in defiance of the social opinion which, under similar conditions, would have hindered almost any one—going forth from the royal palace, where he was treated as a prince of Egypt, to look upon the labours of the downtrodden Israelites, and to cheer them with his kindly words. Behold him smiting the Egyptian taskmaster who was abusing the Israelites. Behold him, in the land of Midian, defending the daughters of Jethro, the Midianite, from the shepherds who denied them their rights at the well. Follow him back to the land of Egypt, and see him engaged in the mighty task of securing his people's freedom; and then go with him on the journey through the wilderness to Mt. Sinai, and see him when, having descended from the mountain, he finds them engaged in idolatrous worship; and then behold his towering wrath as, having burnt and then pulverized the gilded image they were worshiping, he mixes its ashes with some water

and obliges them to swallow it. Does he look or behave like a spiritless man? On the contrary, he was a man of tremendous passions, a man of volcanic force of nature, a man of phenomenal strength and aggressiveness, a man born to command, to be revered and obeyed. It needed such a man as he to control such a people as the Israelites were, and to lead them to the promised land. And yet the Bible says that he was the meekest of men.

Or take the case of St. Paul. He, too, was a very meek man, in the Scriptural sense of the word; but there was surely nothing cowardly or weak about him. He was simply Saul of Tarsus Christianized, a man of most majestic spirit, of indomitable will, of unfailing courage, and of such nobility of character that, standing as a shackled prisoner before Agrippa's judgment seat, he did not hesitate to say to him, "I would that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were such as I am, excepting these bonds." Oh, no, there was nothing weak or unmanly about him.

Nor was there anything of that sort about Jesus of Nazareth, the meekest person and the manliest man who ever trod this earth of ours. Despitefully treated though He was, and led away to be crucified without any resistance, like a sheep to the slaughter, it was not because He feared His enemies, but because He was sufficiently brave and devoted and loyal to His Father's will to endure the cross, despising the shame, for the glory that was set before Him. When occasion required He denounced His enemies to their faces, saying, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Ye brood of vipers, how can ye escape the judgment of Gehenna?" In the outer court of the temple He overturned the tables of the money changers,

and, denouncing the cattle dealers, drove their cattle out of the enclosure with a whip of small cords. And when the soldiers were about to arrest Him as He came forth from Gethsemane, so majestic was His appearance that they fell down before Him and refrained from arresting Him till He gave Himself up to them.

True meekness, then, is nothing unmanly, nothing to be ashamed of before God or the world. As exemplified by its chief exponents, it is consistent with the noblest qualities and the most spirited conduct towards all kinds of iniquity. It is contradistinguished, not from manliness, nor from a proper sense of self-respect, nor from a feeling of righteous anger, but from egotism, vanity, self-assertiveness, jealousy, vindictiveness, and that whole line of sinful feelings. The meek man may have much self-respect, and may claim the respect of other people, but he cannot think of himself more highly than he ought to think, nor claim more consideration than he really deserves. He may be a man of conscious power and may desire to use it to the fullest extent, but he can never be puffed up by it or be willing to use it in any manner which would contravene the ends of justice with reference to even the weakest of men. He may be a man of mighty passions, but not of ungovernable passions, nor of a tyrannical disposition, nor of a vindictive disposition, nor of a selfish disposition, nor of an irreligious disposition in any particular. He rules his own spirit with humility towards God and with respect for the rights of all mankind. He recognizes the fact that he is under the government of a superior Being, and is only one member of the great human family, of which every other member is equally entitled to a fair share of the many blessings which the Creator bestows.

The essence of true meekness, then, is a correct estimate of one's relation to God and mankind. The meek man says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein"; and, full of that assurance, he conducts himself accordingly. That was the secret of the meekness of Moses. It was his attitude towards God, his consciousness of dependence on Him, his feeling of obligation to Him, his unfaltering trust in Him, and his willingness to do His will.

And so it was in modern times with two of our own greatest national leaders. Each of them was a very meek man.

History tells us that George Washington had a very quick temper and great physical courage; and there is a tradition that once, under extreme provocation, when his military orders had been disobeyed, he gave utterance in his anger to some terrible oaths. If the tradition is true, it shows that, like Moses, he fell short of the perfect meekness of the Lord Jesus Christ; for we cannot imagine Jesus Christ as giving way to such an outburst. But, notwithstanding such occasional failings on his part, when we consider what Washington had to put up with during the seven wearisome years of our Revolutionary war, it is a wonder that he seldom, if ever, exhibited any arrogance, or uttered any reproaches, or showed any desire to return evil for evil, but habitually subordinated his personal judgment to the orders of a critical and incompetent Congress, trying to keep his perishing army together and to use it to the best advantage, never doubting that, in some way, God would enable this country to succeed in the end. His meekness, in the Biblical sense of the word, was remarkable. Instead of seeking any selfish end,

or sulking because of the annoyances which hindered him, he humbled himself and devoted all of his energy to the national welfare in a spirit of prayerful reliance on the wisdom and justice and goodness of God.

And so with Abraham Lincoln. Few men have ever suffered more unreasonable criticism, or contended against greater difficulties, than those to which he was subjected while he was the President of this nation. But he endured it all in a spirit of meekness, never reviling, never complaining, never showing any bitterness towards his bitterest enemies, but always showing a perfect trust in the superintending power and purpose of God. His favourite poem was, "O, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?" and no one in such a lofty station was ever less proud or more humble than he.

It is the meekness of such noble people that keeps them in the path of duty and makes them patient and forbearing and true to the end. Their constant aim is not to glorify themselves, but to glorify God and serve the cause of mankind.

Now, such people, the Saviour says, shall inherit the earth; and, in the Biblical sense of the expression, they do. They already inherit it in the sense which the apostle had in mind when he said, in his epistle to the Corinthian Christians, "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

In order to understand my text, we must recognize the fact that there are two kinds of ownership, one of which consists in the possession of a legal title, with the corresponding power to control and to sell, and the other of which consists in the power to enjoy. The

first is derived from human sources. The other is derived from God. He who has but very little of the first kind of ownership may have a great deal of the other and better kind; whereas he who possesses a great deal of the former kind may have scarcely any, or none at all, of the better kind. Some persons who are commonly considered to be very wealthy, because they have the legal title to a vast amount of worldly property, are very poor in respect to the enjoyment of it; whereas others, who, according to worldly standards, are among the poorest of the poor, are very wealthy in their enjoyment of the world which they live in, because they regard it as God's world, and He has given them an appreciation of its treasures and its glories which makes it theirs in the highest and best sense of the word.

What difference does it make to me who holds the legal title to a beautiful picture, if it hangs where I can see it whenever I choose, and if to me it is a source of unqualified pleasure? If its legal owner is a person who has no sense of its beauty, or who habitually associates it with some troublesome thoughts which occur to him whenever he happens to look at it, who owns it the more truly, he or I? Or if some one has a book which is printed in a language of whose meaning he is ignorant, and I understand that language and have access to the volume and take great pleasure in reading it, who owns it the more truly, he or I?

Is not that person the most veritable owner of anything who derives the most enjoyment from it? If so, a servant on the estate of a multi-millionaire may really own it more truly than the rich man himself, and a brakeman on a railway train may own more of the earth than the railroad king who rides in his sumptuous

private car and holds the title to many thousands of acres of land. The more property some people have, the less real pleasure they receive from it. Instead of owning it in the best sense, they are its discontented slaves, driven about by the necessity of taking care of it, and tormented by their fear of losing it and their desire to add to it and their envy of other people who appear to have more. Such people do not really inherit the earth, no matter how extensive their possessions may be. It is the meek who really inherit it—the unselfish, the humble, the religiously minded, who regard it as one of the many rooms in their heavenly Father's mansion, which they, as His children, are free to use and enjoy. They are not hindered by the distinction between mine and thine. They have no covetousness, no envy, to prevent them from enjoying the manifold benefits which the Creator has provided for the enjoyment of all. Like bees which gather honey from every field which they visit, no matter where their hive may be, the meek gather enrichment wherever they are—from the heavens and the earth, from the mountains and the valleys, from the woods and the fields, from waving harvests and wayside flowers, from what is commonly called their own and from that which belongs to others also. It is theirs because it is God's, and they are His children and heirs.

XXI

“IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN”

“Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Caesar.”—
Acts 26: 32.

ALTHOUGH the apostle Paul was of Hebrew parentage, and, as he himself said, was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he was also a Roman citizen, having inherited his status as such from his father, on whom it had been conferred by the Roman government. There were several ways in which a person might obtain such a status otherwise than by inheritance. He might purchase it from the Roman government; or it might be given to him as a reward for distinguished services; or, if he had been a slave, he might receive it by manumission, in connection with his liberty. Howsoever obtained, it involved certain rights and privileges, among which were exemption from punishment by scourging and the right of appealing from the judgment of any lower tribunal to the judgment of the Roman emperor.

So, when Paul was arrested by some of his enemies and was brought to trial before Festus, the Roman governor of Judea, on certain false charges which they had trumped up against him, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen, and, believing that his chances for acquittal would be better at Rome than they would be at Jerusalem, he said to the governor, “I appeal unto Cæsar.” That settled the matter, so far as the place

of the trial was concerned. But, not long afterwards, when Herod Agrippa, who was the ruler of a neighbouring province, paid a visit to Festus, and was informed of the matter, he, being well acquainted with the laws of the Jews, was convinced that Paul had done nothing in violation thereof, and said to his fellow governor, "This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Cæsar."

Perhaps he might have been. Perhaps he was mistaken in supposing that he improved his condition by appealing. Perhaps Festus, after conferring with Agrippa, would have acquitted him. It might have been so. But, even if it had been, would it have been any better for him or for any one? Who can tell? We can easily see, on the one hand, that he would have avoided the dangerous voyage to Rome, in which he was shipwrecked on the island of Melita, and his subsequent years of imprisonment in the capital city, and his final condemnation and execution by the government. But, on the other hand, we have no means of knowing what his fate would have been. Within a week of his acquittal, he might have been assassinated by the band of conspirators who had bound themselves by an oath to make an end of his life. Or any of a hundred other things might have interfered with a continuance of his usefulness. We cannot tell what would have happened to him. But we know that, in fact, his life was prolonged for about six or seven years, and that, during that time, notwithstanding his imprisonment, he did some of the very best work of his life, the loss of which would have been irreparable to the cause of Christianity. For it was during those six or seven years that he wrote his epistles to the Ephesians and the Philippians and the Colossians, and

his four pastoral epistles, besides reaching with his spoken word a multitude of people who were living in Rome, including some of Cæsar's household: so that, as he said in his letter to the Philippians, the things which had happened unto him had fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

By not appealing unto Cæsar, he might have been set at liberty in the land of Judea. By appealing, he was sent to Rome to further the interests of the gospel at the expense of his liberty; and he probably never spent any time in lamenting it. That was not his disposition, nor was it according to the faith which he held and proclaimed. Instead of bemoaning the situation and saying to himself, If I had not appealed unto Cæsar I might perhaps be at liberty, he accepted the facts and, forgetting the things that were behind, pressed onward to the achievements which were still possible for him. And in that respect we should imitate him whenever we have an occasion for doing so.

Many things might now be very different in the world, and also in our personal lives and fortunes, if in times gone by certain things had been done which were left undone, or *vice versa*; and some persons are habitually given to lamenting it, and letting their minds dwell in a morbid manner on the possibility that some things were great mistakes or misfortunes. The most of us are probably prone at times to indulge in such retrospective imaginations and repinings. We wonder what the result would have been if we ourselves had done differently, or if some one else had done differently; and, imagining that it might have been better for us, we perhaps worry over the fear that a mistake has been made and wish that we had taken a different

course. It is so easy to imagine what might have been if something else had been different, and then to fancy that the result might have been a great deal better for us, or for those who are dear to us, or for humanity in general—just as the original disciples of Jesus imagined that it would have been better for the cause of humanity if the woman who anointed His head and His feet had sold the precious ointment which she used for that purpose, and had given the proceeds to some charitable object. “It might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor,” said they.

“It might have been”—how often do we hear those words, and how often they are not only “the saddest words of tongue or pen,” but the most foolish and unprofitable!

For, in the first place, no one can tell what the consequences would be in the long run if something varied from the actual course of affairs. The least alteration in certain particulars may involve far-reaching changes which none of us can foresee. Once start a train of consequences in human affairs and no one but the All-seeing can foretell the result. Why, even in a game of chess, the different moving of a single piece, though it were only a pawn, might so change the entire game that not even the most skilful player could foresee all of the consequences or tell what the ultimate outcome would be; and, if even a game of chess is so complicated a matter, the life of mankind, or of even one human being, is incalculably more so. Every thing in human life is so related to other things that great and unexpected consequences are often brought about by seemingly trivial changes; and while we are apt to assume that it might be much better for us if certain matters had taken

a different turn, we ought also to consider that it might be much worse for us because of numberless contingencies which are not disclosed to our view. Many a temporary success has led to a final defeat, and many a temporary defeat has led to an ultimate victory.

After the battle of Bull Run, in our civil war, it seemed for a while as if the cause of the Unionists had received an almost fatal blow, and as if the cause of the slaveholders had achieved a great victory. Thousands of Northern patriots were then saying to one another, O, if we had only won that battle, the war might have been ended inside of three months; but who can now tell what the end is to be! It seemed as if a terrible mistake had been made, and as if a terrible misfortune had resulted therefrom. But the future proved that that defeat was the best thing that could have happened for the cause of the Unionists—not to bring the war to a speedy termination, but to get rid of the great evil which was causing the war: for if the rebellion had been speedily brought to an end, slavery would not have been brought to an end, but would have continued indefinitely with all of its attendant evils. The defeat at Bull Run was a blessing in disguise. And so with many another apparent misfortune. In many an instance, what now seems a misfortune will prove to have been providential, and the person who now laments it will have occasion to say, verily, God was in that place, and I knew it not.

Instead of bemoaning our apparent mistakes and misfortunes, and imagining how much better something else might have been, let us, then, consider how much worse it might have been for us, and that perhaps, on the whole, we are really much more fortunate than we should otherwise be.

Among the many retrospections which are likely to cause useless and unwise repinings are those which are caused by the death of our loved ones, especially if they are taken away in childhood or in early manhood or womanhood. For, hard though it is for us to be deprived of their companionship, what certainty have we that their departure is not better for them than a longer existence in this world would have been? Who knows that, if their lives had been prolonged in this world, they would have fulfilled our high hopes and expectations concerning them? Better, far better apparently, if some persons had not lived as long as they have; better if they had died in infancy, or in early manhood or womanhood, than to have lived to become the human wrecks that they are. Those who die in early life escape at least from that great danger—

*“Gone, we know not from what suffering,—
Fled, we know not from what sin,—
They at least are safe from falling
On the battle field of life,
Overcome, as thousands have been,
By temptation, care, and strife”—*

And, after they have gone away, we have only precious memories of them, with a blessed assurance of meeting them again in a better world beyond the grave.

When Arthur Hallam died, in the flower of his exceptionally brilliant young manhood, Alfred Tennyson was heart-broken; for Hallam was his dearest friend. For years he did not cease to mourn for him, longing “for the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that was still.” To him it seemed a strange and almost cruel thing that a life so beautiful and promising should have been taken away. But, little by

little, his grief was transmuted into an inspiring memory, as a result of which he wrote the poem "In Memoriam," which has comforted and uplifted many thousands of souls, and by means of which not only he, but Hallam also, "being dead, yet speaketh." Who knows but by his early death Hallam did more for the cause of humanity than if his life had been prolonged on this side of the grave?

Let us never give way, in any case, to vain regrets and useless longings, but always endeavour to make the best of our present opportunities.

And, even if we have sinned and are suffering for it, let us not despair, but repent and reform. Instead of worrying about either the past or the future, let us "let the dead past bury its dead," and

*"Act, act in the living Present,
Heart within and God o'erhead!"*

Ah, yes, God o'erhead,—that is why we need not worry, no matter by what uncertainties our life is surrounded. That is a sublime certainty to which we can turn with assurance. From the jurisdiction of Festus, Paul appealed unto Cæsar; and from the jurisdiction of Cæsar, he appealed unto God. That final appeal is always open to all of us. In all of our perplexities and troubles and dangers we can appeal to the King of Kings for assistance and guidance, and He will not refuse to give it to us; for He is not only our King but our heavenly Father, always lovingly watching over us and providing better things for us than we could provide for ourselves. He knows our imperfection, and how to develop us; our sinfulness, and how to save us. Our wisdom, then, is to trust in Him

from day to day, doing the best that we know how for ourselves and for others, and leaving Him to determine what the issue shall be.

*“His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.”*

XXII

A PRECIOUS SECRET

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant."—PSA. 25: 14.

IN ancient times, many people believed in the potency of talismans. A ring, or a precious stone, or something else which he carried, was supposed to endow a person with secret knowledge and ability, and to protect him from danger as he went on his way. Whoever had such an article was considered very fortunate, inasmuch as good ones were supposed to be hard to obtain.

Of course, the belief was a superstition. A talisman had no actual efficacy; but it may symbolize the important fact that some people have a kind of knowledge which gives them a great advantage in the conduct of life. It is not necessary for a person to have a magical ring, or a curious stone, or anything else of that nature, in order to possess knowledge which is serviceable to him and which has not been revealed to the rest of mankind. With reference to certain matters, some persons really have a sort of talismanic knowledge, their possession of which is unknown to the world excepting in so far as they choose to reveal it.

One person, for example, has such knowledge with reference to business affairs. He understands the secrets of trade and finance; he has private information in regard to the value of certain materials or certain changes which are soon to occur in the stock market.

And what power it gives to him! What ability to meet and overcome his competitors! What command of the situation! What wealth, if he chooses! As he passes along the busy street with a multitude of other people, no one can see any signs of his special ability. In his outward appearance, there is nothing to distinguish him in that respect from the rest of the throng. But when he engages in business, his power appears. Then the advantage of the secret knowledge which he possesses is manifest.

Another is the possessor of political secrets. He understands the inside workings of political machinery. He knows what pieces are to be moved on the political chess-board, and what the effect of the changes will be. And because of that knowledge, he has extraordinary power in the political world. Nothing disconcerts him or permanently defeats him. If he fails to win in one way, he wins in some other way. He succeeds as a politician, let things turn as they may.

Another has acquired a special knowledge of Nature; and where his neighbours see and hear nothing else but the commonplace, he sees and hears the hidden meanings of the common sights and sounds around him. To him, every stone tells a wonderful story, and all of the various objects of Nature have messages which are unknown to the great mass of mankind. He has the scientist's knowledge; and no talisman was ever thought to accomplish such miracles as he accomplishes with the agencies which he knows how to control.

The knowledge of certain secrets, then, is advantageous to those who have it. It gives them resources which other people have not. Not every one can have such knowledge, no matter how earnestly he may desire

it and strive for it. Only a few persons comparatively ever succeed in obtaining it.

But, fortunately for all of us, there is a much more important kind of knowledge, which, although it is now possessed by only a minority of mankind, can be easily obtained by any one who earnestly seeks for it. It is that to which my text refers.

“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” Instead of the word “secret,” the words “counsel” and “friendship” are given in the margin of the Revised Version as alternative renderings; and the statement apparently means that to those who fear Him God makes a special revelation, giving them an inward assurance of His love and protection and of their ultimate salvation and everlasting blessedness. He gives them a realizing consciousness of His affectionate care for them. He teaches them that their afflictions are meant for their benefit, and that all of their experiences, however mysterious, are working together for their ultimate good. He assures them of a future life, and enables them to look forward to the coming of a time when sin and sorrow shall be no more. That is the precious secret which He imparts to their souls—a secret consciousness of His loving care for them and purpose concerning them.

It is a secret in the sense of being imparted only to those who are prepared to receive it, and of being something which they cherish in the depths of their souls.

In the outward appearance of a person who possesses that knowledge there may be nothing whatever to indicate his possession of it—although, in the long run, his acquaintances will see in him an extraordinary cheer-

fulness and an exceptional degree of hopefulness and courage and persistency. Those qualities will to some extent show in his conduct, but the cause of them will not be known excepting by those persons who possess the same secret. Other people may hear of it, but they cannot understand it. He may tell them about it, but the words which he uses will not have the same meaning to them as to him. Words are not the same as truth. Thousands of people are quite familiar with the words of the gospel and sadly ignorant of the truth of it. They do not treasure its heavenly meaning in the depths of their souls. Its blessedness is hidden from them. It is nothing to them but words, words, words. When they hear of the love of God, and the providence of God, and the covenant of God, it is a mystery to them. The reality to which such expressions refer is a secret which has not been revealed to their souls.

But to those who have learned it, oh, what comfort it gives, what power and protection, as they journey through life—power to overcome temptation, power to endure hardships and trials and sorrows, power to persevere in the face of all obstacles, power to be patient and hopeful and cheerful under the most afflictive fortune, and not only to meet death without fear when it comes, but even to welcome it as a means to a more glorious life!

Enoch knew that precious secret; and it enabled him, after walking with God all the days of his life, to pass on from this world to the next one so easily that what others called death was to him but transition. Abraham had learned it; and it sustained him through all the long years of his wanderings, and finally enabled him to meet death with an unwavering confidence that in his seed should all families of the earth have a bless-

ing. Moses was aware of it; and it supported him through all of the trials of the wilderness, when he would otherwise have fainted or given up in despair. Elisha was acquainted with it; and it enabled him, when surrounded by his enemies at Dothan, to perceive that a heavenly army was arrayed on his side. David had received it; and it enabled him, in his troubles, to compose the twenty-third psalm. The apostle Paul was familiar with it; and therefore he could be content in whatsoever state he was, and could truthfully say that for him to live was Christ and to die was gain.

Thousands of other persons have known the same secret. Thousands know it today; and to all who have learned it, it gives the same advantage over those who have not. It enables them to see the true meaning of life. It gives them a clue to its mysteries. Where others see only the hard lines of necessity, they can read between the lines a message of comfort and hope and good will. Where others can see only the dusty highway of life, they get continual glimpses of the delectable mountains and know that the way which is marked out for them, however difficult to follow, is the way which God has ordained for them, and that it leads to the gates of the heavenly city, where earthly troubles shall be no more. Nothing can dishearten them, because they know that God loves them and is constantly watching over them, and that, in His own good time and His own good way, He will prove to them that their trials have been good for their souls.

In their lives there are many things which they cannot understand—many experiences which trouble them, many mysteries which excite their cogitation and wonderment. Their faith is often tried by such things;

but it never fails them, because the secret of the Lord is with them, and their knowledge of His covenant makes them confident and victorious. Like Elisha at Dothan, when beleaguered by difficulties, they have help from on high. As Whittier says,

*"There are who, like the seer of old,
Can see the helpers God has sent,
And how life's rugged mountain side
Is white with many an angel tent.*

*"They hear the heralds whom the Lord
Sends down His pathway to prepare,
And light, from others hidden, shines
On their high place of praise and prayer.*

*"Let such, for earth's despairing ones,
Hopeless, yet longing to be free,
Breathe once again the prophet's prayer,
'Lord, ope their eyes, that they may see.'"*

Oh, that they might see! For how pitiable is the condition of those who do not! In times of prosperity they may seem quite contented, but when trouble arises they are despondent and helpless. And, no matter how prosperous their outward fortunes may be, or what resources of worldly wisdom and learning they have, life cannot be otherwise than a meaningless thing to them, compared with what it would be if they understood its significance and could interpret its events in the light of God's covenant. Without a consciousness of His love and His superintending providence, no one can go through life with the same serenity of spirit and the same mastery of events as if he possessed such a consciousness. It is as impossible as for a bird to fly if deprived of its wings. Such a person has nothing

to uplift and sustain him. But he who possesses the secret of the Lord can always mount up with wings as an eagle; he can renew his strength; he can run and not be weary; he can walk and not faint.

Observe now to whom it is said that this secret is given. It is given only to those who conform to the requirement which is set forth in my text—a requirement which is inherent in the very nature of the case; for whoever would have any kind of knowledge must obey the conditions on which its possession depends.

For instance, whoever would have an intimate knowledge of Nature must obey the conditions which Nature imposes. If he would enter into its secrets, he must conform to its laws. He must come to it in a spirit of humility and discipleship. Nature tells nothing to self-pinionated people who endeavour to make it sustain their own theories. It conceals its secrets from all such people, and tells them only to those who patiently obey its directions. The true scientist must be an obedient man, subordinating his own theories and wishes and intelligence to the unchangeable laws of the natural world.

So of him who would learn the secrets of art, or of economics, or of anything else which requires an intelligent use of its principles. There are certain inexorable rules to be followed, and no one can obtain the knowledge if he disobeys or ignores them.

Even so in regard to this best of all secrets. It is revealed only to those who fear the Lord. That is the uncompromising condition. But it is a condition with which all persons can comply if they will; because it requires us simply to reverence the Lord and obey Him—not to fear Him as an enemy, but only with that kind of fear with which a child should regard a loving

father who exercises a father's rightful government over him. If any one fears the Lord in that way, the Lord will show him His covenant, giving him an assurance of His love and protection and of the certainty that all will be well in the end.

That is what the Saviour meant when He said, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"; and, again, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes." If only those who are wise and prudent from the world's point of view were competent to discover the truth of the gospel, and to realize its saving power, the great majority of mankind would be debarred from the privilege; but, happily, that is not the case. All that is needed is a teachable spirit; a humble, obedient, child-like spirit; a spirit that says "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and then does it with faithfulness.

Many people have no intimate knowledge of the gospel merely because they will not obey the condition of obtaining it. Some of them insist upon making their own conditions, like those Jews who demanded a sign from the Saviour—by which they meant such a sign as agreed with their politics—instead of accepting the actual signs which He gave to them.

When Professor Gray, the distinguished botanist, who was an earnest believer in the Christian religion, asked Mr. Darwin, the renowned evolutionist, what possible proof would convince him that there is a design in creation, and an intelligent designer behind its phenomena, Mr. Darwin replied: "Your question, 'What would convince me?' is a poser. If I saw an angel come down to teach us so, and I was convinced, from

others seeing him, that I was not mad, I should believe"; and, again, "If man was made of brass and iron, and in no way connected with any other organism which had ever lived, I should perhaps be convinced." Because no such sign was given to him he would not accept the numerous signs which are actually given to us, and consequently had no faith in a personal Providence or in any life beyond the grave. He was unfortunately one of a great number of people who would believe in the gospel, or who think that they would, if God would adopt their way instead of His own way. But that He will never do; and until they are willing to accept His way instead of their own way, He will not, for He cannot, impart His truth to their souls.

Via lucis, via crucis—the way of light is the way of the cross—and the way to be spiritually enlightened regarding the great problems and trials of life is to humble one's self, and take up the cross, and follow Him Who is "the way and the truth and the life."

If, then, you would have the light of life and be wise unto salvation, accept Jesus Christ as your teacher and example. Then He will make His abode with you. He will tell you the secret of life and of death. He will give you to eat of the hidden manna. His peace and joy will fill your soul as the years go by; and, finally,

*"the end shall tell
The dear Lord doeth all things well."*

XXIII

THE PARABLE OF THE EMPTY HOUSE

“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return to my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”—MATT. 12: 43-45.

THIS is evidently a parable, a story which Jesus told to illustrate a truth. The story itself is fictitious, like that of the Rich Man and Lazarus; and it was founded, like that story, on a popular superstition which the Jewish people had adopted from the nations that surrounded them. It was believed that after the death of their physical bodies the spirits of certain wicked persons entered into the bodies of other persons and made a great deal of trouble for them. Such spirits were called demons, and certain diseases were commonly attributed to their influence. Insanity and epilepsy are the modern names of those diseases. Jesus cured many people who had those diseases, and His enemies said that He did it with the help of Beelzebub, whom they supposed to be the prince of demons. They accused Him of being in league with the devil, notwithstanding the absurdity, which He pointedly showed to them, of supposing that the devil, if there were such a being, would oppose his own accomplices and turn them out of their homes.

When, therefore, they demanded that He should show them a sign from heaven to prove His Messiahship, He told them that, owing to their state of mind, it would be of no use to them; inasmuch as their unbelief, if driven away temporarily, would soon return and be greater and worse than before, like a demon, with reinforcements, returning to the body of a person from whom it had once been expelled. He implied by the parable that, even if He should comply with their unbelieving demand, and so compel them temporarily to cease from denying Him, they would not really believe in Him, but would be merely vacant-minded for a while in regard to Him, and would then find some excuse for increasing their enmity and their demoniac determination to put Him to death.

Such was the meaning of the parable, so far as the Jews were concerned; and we know how it was corroborated by the course of events. For a little while, because of His miracles, a great many of them followed Him and professed to believe in Him, but, having no real affection for Him, and no genuine devotion to the principles of His Kingdom, they soon forsook Him, and cried out, "Crucify him! Away with this man!"

And if this story of a wicked spirit returning with reinforcements to its former habitation had a special application to the case of the Jews, it is no less applicable to many a person who is living today. Properly taken, it conveys a truth of great importance to every one—namely, that the only way of getting permanently rid of an evil spirit is by permanently filling its place with a good one.

It is not necessary to accept the ancient theory about demons in order to see that many people are inhabited

by evil spirits—that is, by evil thoughts and feelings, evil wishes, dispositions, ambitions, and impulses.

Every person is not only a spiritual being, but he has a spirit of some sort which is distinct from himself—an attribute, a quality, a characteristic—which to some extent determines his life and his influence. We are told that the King of Babylon preferred Daniel above his companions because “an excellent spirit was in him”; and Paul said that he was thankful that God had given to him “not the spirit of fear, but the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” There are good spirits and bad spirits—spirits of “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, temperance, faith”; and, on the other hand, spirits of hatred, and envy, and arrogance, and cowardice, and meanness, and intemperance, and infidelity, and misery.

And, oh, what slaves some people are to the evil spirits that have possession of them! There are no other such pitiable people in the world as the victims of their own evil dispositions and propensities; and the greatest need of mankind is complete deliverance from the indwelling of such malevolent spirits. That is the kind of salvation which all people have need of. And the only way to accomplish it is by filling the places of such injurious spirits with the good spirits which, as a matter of course, are opposed to them.

Nature, we are told, abhors a vacuum; and that is as true in regard to spiritual as to material things. If we merely try to empty ourselves of all badness, without filling ourselves with goodness, we shall certainly fail. We cannot maintain such a vacuum. The evil that is in us, if cast out temporarily, will come back and resume its sway and be worse than before.

That is one of the reasons why so many attempts at

reform end in failure, not only with individuals but on the part of communities; for example, in dealing with the criminal classes, and in trying to get rid of political corruption.

When a person commits a crime, society arrests and imprisons him, and so prevents him from committing any further offences for a few months or a term of years, according to what he has done. And when he comes out of prison, having received there no positive instruction in righteousness, no inculcation of moral impulses, his old companions get hold of him, his old habits return to him, and he is worse than before.

Every now and then, the officers of the law, or of some organization for reforming society, make a forcible raid upon houses of prostitution or gambling establishments, and some good people are jubilant; but in a few weeks all of those places are open again, or a lot of others which are under a similar management, and the demoralizing business goes on as before.

And so, every now and then, we have a spasm of political reformation and house-cleaning. For a little while there is great excitement in getting rid of a gang of plunderers who have been using the public offices as a means of robbing the community. But, having seemingly accomplished it, the community relaxes its vigilance and takes no positive measures to keep good men in office; and, almost before we are aware of it, back comes the old gang, and the old conditions are intensified, and it will be harder to get rid of them the next time than before.

In all such cases the failure is due to the fact that the reformers stop at just the point where they ought to go on, assuming that they have made an ending when they have only made a beginning, and depending

only on restrictive methods for the accomplishment of what they desire to do, ignoring the truth to which my text calls attention. Which is as if a farmer should try to get rid of the weeds with which a field is overrun, by merely taking a scythe and cutting them down. Suppose that he cuts down every one of them, and then gathers them up and burns them, and then gives the field a thorough ploughing, upturning every inch of sod and laying it bare to the open air, and then wipes his brow and says to himself, "Well, I guess that that field won't bear any more weeds." What will be the result, if he does nothing more? How long will he enjoy his apparent victory? Even while he is rejoicing in what he has done, the germs of a million little weed seeds which have been hidden in the ground, and which have hitherto had no chance to grow, are congratulating themselves on their magnificent opportunity. The air, too, contains multitudes of wind-wafted seeds, flying hither and thither in search of a home, and as they come to that empty, inviting field, down they come and begin to grow. Besides which, the roots of many of the old weeds still retain their vitality. And so, some fine morning, the farmer discovers that, instead of having got entirely rid of the weeds, he has raised a larger crop and sturdier.

What should he have done to insure a victory? Why, in place of the weeds which he cut down, he should have planted something else, of a different character—corn, or wheat, or beans, or potatoes, or any of a hundred other things that are useful to humanity. The ground would then have been safeguarded against a return to its former condition; and, if any weeds began to grow, he could very easily have prevented them.

Human nature is like a field. The Bible calls it

“God’s husbandry.” And if we would get rid of the evil things that grow there, we must not only try to drive them out, but must be careful to fill their places with the good and the true. In short, we must overcome evil with good.

Even in regard to our physical condition, this principle holds. To banish sickness, and keep it banished, we must do something besides taking medicine. Medicine has its uses. It is sometimes like a scythe with which to cut down the weeds. But medicine alone will not make a man healthy. In order to be healthy we must keep our bodies supplied with good food and good drink and good air and good clothing, and take a proper amount of the right kind of exercise. We may temporarily get rid of the symptoms of sickness by driving them away with sedatives, but we cannot medicate ourselves into a state of good health. Our main dependance must always be on hygienic regulations, to which medicine at its best is no more than a helper.

And so with mental diseases. They can be permanently cured only in accordance with this principle.

Suppose that a person is troubled with chronic despondency, or with what some people call “the blues.” He can drive it away for an hour or two by taking a drink of intoxicating liquor, or by going to some place of excitement or gaiety, as multitudes of people actually do in such cases. But in the end that makes the trouble a great deal worse than before. The evil spirit, thus driven away, returns with reinforcements when the excitement is over, and tortures its victim with greater misery, and perhaps drives him to suicide. No help that way lies. The only real remedy for such a disease is to fill the mind with wholesome thoughts. Sometimes a person gets the blues because

he has nothing else to do. He suffers from the melancholia of continuous idleness. In that case, the best remedy is some useful employment to occupy his time and thoughts. Or if the despondency is owing to excessive employment, then the remedy is rest, or a change of employment, to restore the mental elasticity which has worn out underneath the continuous strain.

Or suppose that a person is troubled with skepticism in regard to the great truths of the Christian religion. He doubts the Bible, he doubts the doctrine of immortality, perhaps he even doubts the existence of God—not because he wishes to doubt, but because he is so constituted that he cannot do otherwise, like Thomas in regard to his Lord's resurrection. How shall he be cured of it? Shall we try to frighten the demon out of him? Shall we picture to such a skeptical person the horrors of a fiery hell, and tell him that unless he believes in Christianity he will be sent to such a place and remain there forever? That is the course which some people pursue; and no doubt many a person has been frightened in that way into thinking that he believed in a devil, at any rate. But no genuine cure was ever accomplished in that way; and there is always danger that, when the excitement is over, the last state of that man will be worse than the first.

The real cure for such a state of mind is that which was given by the Saviour Himself when He said to the unbelieving Jews, "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Not all at once, but by sure degrees, into any one who obeys that rule the spirit of an abiding faith will enter, and prevent any further doubt of the Christian religion.

That was the case with Professor Romanes, one of England's most distinguished scientists. In his early life he published a book in which, on scientific grounds, he cast doubt on Christianity and on the existence of God. But, later in life, he published another book, full of profound faith in the teachings of Christ, and containing this statement as to the change in his views: "It does not appear that the modifications which my views have undergone are due so much to purely logical processes of the intellect as to the subconscious influences due to the ripening experiences of life." In honestly seeking for truth and righteousness, according to the light which he had, he gradually came to believe in Christianity. While he was doing what Christianity tells us to do, his doubts in regard to it vanished away, as darkness departs from a room when the windows are opened and the sunlight comes in.

And, finally, the same principle applies to the cure of sin. The only way to expel it and to keep it from returning is by introducing the spirit of positive righteousness, which is the spirit of love to both God and mankind. No one can become sinless by merely resolving to be so, or by merely endeavouring not to commit any sins; for no matter how earnestly he may try not to transgress the prohibitory commandments, the old Adam in his nature will repeatedly assert itself unless it is superseded by "the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Said the great apostle of the Gentiles, "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death," and that must be the experience of every person who is really redeemed from the dominion of sin. When the holy spirit of love comes

in, the evil spirit of sin necessarily vanishes, for the two cannot exist together.

Never content yourself, then, with merely negative measures, or with any merely half-way measures, in trying to banish the spirit of evil from yourself or from others. Make no terms with it, no concessions to it, no compromise with it, but persevere in opposing it till you have completely and forever overcome it with good.

XXIV.

AS A FOOL DIETH

"Should Abner die as a fool dieth?"—II SAM. 3: 33 [R. V.].

ABNER was a cousin of King Saul and the captain of his army. After the death of Saul, he held the same position in the army of Ishbosheth, against whom the tribe of Judah protested and revolted, setting up a separate kingdom and choosing David as its king. Warfare then followed between the two kingdoms, and continued for about two years, till, under a feeling of discouragement and of resentment towards Ishbosheth, Abner decided to transfer his allegiance to David, and went to Hebron for that purpose with a retinue of twenty men. There he entered into a covenant with David, agreeing to exert his influence to bring all of the twelve tribes under David's control.

But when Joab, the captain of David's army, was informed of the covenant, he was highly indignant, professing to think that Abner was not to be trusted. In reality, however, he was jealous of Abner, and was fearful of being supplanted by him as the captain of King David's army. So, under a pretence of desiring to talk with him, he quietly drew Abner aside from his retinue, and then murdered him by surreptitiously thrusting a dagger into his side.

Thus perished a man of exceptional ability; and David very bitterly lamented his death—not only because it ended the life of a person from whom he had

fondly hoped to receive great assistance, but because it took place in a manner so shameful, so unworthy both of the murderer and of him who was slain. He felt that a person of Abner's excellent reputation ought not to have died so ignominious a death, and that he ought not to have been so foolish as to put himself unguardedly within the reach of his enemy. He felt that such a man should have died, if at all, in a glorious manner, bravely using his faculties, instead of being entrapped and unresistingly slaughtered by the craftiness of his foe. That was what excited his sorrowful indignation and drew forth the lamentation of which my text is a portion :

"Should Abner die as a fool dieth?

*Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters;
As a man falleth before the children of iniquity, so didst
thou fall."*

It was the lament of a man who was himself a true soldier over the unsoldierly death of another one, and also of a man of noble impulses over the ignoble ending of a life of noble possibilities.

It is an occasion for lamentation when any person dies in a discreditable manner, or under circumstances which imply any foolishness on his part. Substitute for the name of Abner the name of any other person, and the question is equally pertinent. Should he die as a fool dieth?

No one needs to die in that way, unless he is a natural fool, made so by forces beyond his control. Some persons are naturally so deficient in intelligence as not to be able to safeguard themselves. They live foolishly, and are likely to die foolishly, through no fault of their own. Figuratively speaking, their hands

are bound and their feet are in fetters as long as they live in this world. But that is not the case with the majority of mankind. Most persons are so well endowed that they can both live and die in such a manner as to deserve and receive the approval of their acquaintances. They have such physical and intellectual and spiritual faculties that, if they will only make a proper use of them, they can both live and die in such a manner as will redound to their credit, and not to their shame. Otherwise, they are chargeable with blameworthy foolishness, like that of Abner in not guarding against Joab's hostility. And, if it was deplorable for him to die in that way, instead of dying like a hero, how deplorable it is for any person to die without having made the best use of his powers as long as his earthly life continued! How sad to die with wasted powers and opportunities thrown away!

Among the people who die thus foolishly there are many whose folly consists primarily in ignoring the fact that they are liable to die, and that they should guard against the dangers which are lying in wait for them.

Abner should have been on his guard against Joab. He should have bethought himself that Joab was a treacherous man with a personal interest in getting him out of the way. Had he borne that obvious fact in mind and taken proper precautions with reference to it, he might have lived a good deal longer and have died a noble death at last. By disregarding the danger he unfitted himself to cope with it, and therefore died as a fool dieth. And yet the danger to which he thus foolishly exposed himself was no greater than that to which thousands of persons are constantly and thoughtlessly exposing themselves. Living in a world where

the conditions of health are inexorable, and where graveyards are being filled with the bodies of people who disregard those conditions, they act as if they thought that they themselves had immunity, and as if, to use the words of Shakespeare, "the flesh that walls-about their life were brass impregnable." What folly for a person to act in that way, ignoring his mortality and his liability to the various causes of death, taking no precautions with reference to it and making no preparation to meet it meritoriously when it finally comes, as it certainly will!

What should we think of a person who went carelessly on from day to day, buying goods and contracting debts, without making any reckoning of the liability incurred by it or any arrangements to meet the demands of his creditors? Unfortunately, there are such people, but they are not regarded as wise. We call them either knaves or fools. And yet every one of us, sooner or later, must pay the unavoidable debt of nature which requires that the body shall return to the dust while the spirit returns to Him Who gave it; and if we are to pay that debt as it should be paid, so as to have an honourable discharge from this world, we must make some preparation for it. Die we must; but, having intellectual and spiritual faculties, let us not neglect to take proper precautions, so as to die in such a manner as will be no reproach to us. To take no such precautions is to die as a fool dieth.

And if it is foolish to ignore our liability to die, and therefore to take no precautions concerning it, how much more so to invite an untimely demise by any sort of reckless conduct! To imperil one's life in the performance of a duty is neither foolish nor reprehensible. It is highly honourable and praiseworthy. It is to risk

one kind of life for the sake of a higher kind. But to risk one's physical life in a mere spirit of recklessness, or for notoriety's sake, or for a financial consideration, or to escape from the troubles of the present state of existence, has no justification, and whoever dies in that way dies the death of a fool.

No person has a right to destroy his own life, either directly or indirectly, unless he offers it as a sacrifice to the cause of God and humanity, in obedience to his conscience or to a call from some authority which is higher than he. To commit suicide is utterly wrong and unwarrantable. Life is a sacred trust bestowed by a loving Creator, to be used in a noble manner for praiseworthy ends till He Himself shall terminate it. To terminate it for ourselves, or to imperil it needlessly, is as blameworthy as for a soldier to run away from his station; and he who meets his death in that way is chargeable with disgrace and foolishness.

Alas, how many people there are who are guilty of that sort of foolishness! Not only is there a large number of deliberate suicides, but there is a vastly larger number of inconsiderate people who have habits that are certainly impairing their health and inviting the speedy arrival of death.

Every now and then some foolhardy adventurer endeavours to swim across the Niagara rapids, or jumps from one of the bridges which extend across the East River; and his action is reported at great length in the newspapers, with possibly some editorial comments on the foolishness of such performances. But it hardly attracts any public attention that thousands are constantly risking their lives in ways which are almost equally absurd and imprudent. It is so common a thing both for men and for women to leap into the

turbulent current of what is known as fast living, the end of which is physical and spiritual death, that we witness it with scarcely a remark or an emotion.

Many a young and promising man, as well equipped as Abner was with physical and mental and moral resources, makes that exceedingly foolish mistake. His hands are not bound nor his feet put in fetters by any one but himself. With a proper use of his faculties he might lead a noble, prosperous life, prolonging his days, and winning the approbation of his friends and acquaintances. He might become a leader among the forces of righteousness, a captain on the side of humanity's welfare, or be, at least, a highly efficient and praiseworthy soldier. But, alas, he is betrayed by his carnal passions, or by the persuasions of his companions, or by a spirit of self-will and overweening self-confidence, into ignoring the laws of physical and spiritual welfare; and the consequence is that, instead of living a long and useful and honourable life, he comes to an untimely and scandalous end.

Oh, the pity and the shame of it, that so many of the most promising young men of the land should thus die as a fool dieth, instead of laudably filling out their days! Well may we lament for them, as David lamented for Abner, or as Jeremiah lamented for the people of Israel when he saw that they were destroying themselves by their sins. "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears," said he, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" Alas, for the foolish victims of injurious habits and sinful propensities! Whoso is betrayed by such things is not wise.

And alas for those people who, although they are doing nothing to shorten their lives, are doing nothing

to ennoble them, or to enrich themselves with that sort of treasure which alone will be of value to them when they come to the end of their earthly career! They also are in danger of dying as a fool dieth, because they are laying up for themselves no treasure in heaven, no spiritual riches of righteousness and peace and joy—as Jesus taught in His parable of a certain rich man who, having so many worldly goods that he intended to build more barns to hold them, suddenly heard the solemn message, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” Ah, yes, “so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.” So is every one who is not careful to live so judiciously that when he enters the other world he will not find himself in a spiritually impoverished condition.

What should we think of a person who, being about to set sail for a far-away country, should make no effort to provide himself with the things that he will need there, but should bring down to the wharf a whole cart-load of stuff which would not only be useless in the place to which he is going but which he would not even be permitted to take away from the shore? Should we call him a wise man? How much more so is he who comes down to the grave with nothing else but a lot of worldly and temporal possessions?

There is a remarkable painting, by a Russian artist, representing a stormy scene on the shore of the Black Sea. Up from the midst of the dashing waves there rises a mountainous promontory, rocky, steep, and far-uplifted towards the cloudy, wind-swept sky. Close to the base of the promontory there emerges from the water a piece of timber, from which there has just

escaped a man who is clinging with desperation to the face of the precipice, saved from the foaming sea, but bereft of his possessions, and having before him the painful task of climbing to the summit of the stupendous acclivity.

Behold in that picture an allegory. Behold in that expanse of water the uncertain sea of our earthly life. And behold in that poor shipwrecked sailor the man who enters the other world without having any treasures which he can retain and make use of. Saved by the grace of God from being completely destroyed, he reaches the shore of the spirit world. But the heavenly life, how far above him! Spiritually poor and naked, he lies at the very foot of the mountain of holiness, whence he must climb as best he can to an experience of such blessedness as is possible for him. Of what use to him now are his former possessions—his carnal pleasures, his stocks and bonds, his political preferences, or his power to command the obedience of men? Of what value are such things on the other side of the grave? The only things of value to us when we enter the other world are the spiritual treasures stored away in our souls. If we have gathered spiritual wisdom and power and goodness, nobility of character, Christliness, godliness, then we shall not have lived in vain; and, no matter how or when death comes, we can meet it triumphantly. Otherwise, we cannot.

The only way to die wisely is by living wisely beforehand; and the only way of living wisely is by living a life of true religion, in love to God and love to man, using our God-given powers to the best of our ability, whether of body, of mind, or of soul. He who lives in that way need have no anxiety as to the termination of his earthly career. For when the time comes for

him to walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
he will be calm and triumphant and safe from all evil,
and the grave will be

*“but a covered bridge
Leading from light to light, through a brief darkness.”*

God help us all to live and die “not as fools, but as
wise men, redeeming the time.”

XXV

OUR HEAVENLY HOME

"Man goeth to his long home."—ECCL. 12:5.

THERE are about fifteen hundred millions of people in the world, and, a hundred years from now, but very few of them will remain. Occasionally some man or woman lives for more than a hundred years, but the longest-lived soon disappear, going the way of the countless millions who have lived here since the world began. How many have ever lived here we have no means of knowing, for the most of them have left no trace behind. And so it will be with all future generations. Every day many thousands come into the world, and during the same brief period many thousands go out of it.

*"Like shadows gliding o'er the plain,
Or clouds that move successive on,
Man's busy generations pass,
And while we gaze their forms are gone."*

What becomes of them, after that?

We commonly say that people die when they come to the end of their earthly career; and we know what becomes of their physical forms. We know that their bodies decay and are resolved into dust. We know that the earth is a vast burial ground, carrying in its soil the disintegrated remains of whatever it gave in times gone by to the people whom it once sustained.

Dust they were in their origin, and unto dust they have returned, so far as their visible forms were concerned.

But their bodies were not themselves, and to tell us what has become of those perishable organisms is like telling us what has become of their castaway clothing—only that, and nothing more.

When the members of the Peary party, exploring the northern coast of Greenland, discovered the deserted camp of the Greely party, and found there some clothing and a number of other things which indicated who had been there, the discovery gave them no information whatever as to the whereabouts of the persons to whom those things had belonged. They were not able to determine by means of those relics whether any of the members of the earlier expedition had reached the North Pole, or what else had become of them. And so, when we visit any place which contains material remains or forsaken possessions of persons who formerly lived in this world, we can learn nothing therefrom as to what has become of the persons themselves. Their remains or memorials simply emphasize the question, Where did they themselves go when they parted with those things, and where are they at the present time?

That is a question of tremendous importance; and without the right answer to it we can never be satisfied.

The Bible says that all such persons have gone to their eternal home, and it is eminently worth our while to consider what that statement means.

It surely does not mean that they have gone out of existence. It means that somewhere they are still alive, and that the place where they are is a genuine home

to them. That is evident from the natural meaning of the statement and also from that of its immediate context; for the context says, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." The place to which every one goes when he departs from this world is a spiritual abiding place; it is somewhere in the spirit world, whose boundaries, if it has any, have not been revealed to us. Longfellow says of it,

*"The spirit world around this world of sense
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapors dense
A vital breath of more ethereal air";*

and there are many things which tend to confirm the assertion. But, whether that be true or not, the spirit world, wherever it is, is the place to which people go when they depart from this world, and it will finally be the home of every one in the sweetest and most captivating sense of the word.

For what is a home? What constitutes it? We use the word with various meanings. Sometimes we mean the house in which a person resides, or in which he habitually eats and sleeps, though it be only a boarding house. Sometimes we mean one's native land, or the place where he spent his early years, even though he afterward moved far away from it. But behind all of the other meanings which we give to the word is that which it had in the mind of the wanderer who, far away from his native land, wrote the beautiful lines of "Home, Sweet Home," and also in the mind of him who wrote the affecting lines of "The Old Folks at Home."

Home, in the primary sense of the word, the sweet-

est and highest sense, is the abode of those who are most dear to us. It is the place where, under the paternal roof, parents and children, brothers and sisters, dwell together in affectionate relationship and companionship. That is home, wherever it is; and when any one is homesick, that is what he is longing for—not merely for any particular house or locality, but for the company of those who belong to his family. They make a home for him wherever they dwell; and, be it ever so humble, no other place is so dear to him in all the wide world.

The world to which we shall go when we depart from the present one will be our home in that primary sense of the word—our final and everlasting home, in comparison with which our earthly homes are only as a pilgrim's tent which will be of no more service to him when he reaches his journey's end.

For, in the first place, when we enter that spirit world we shall find our heavenly Father there, and shall be spiritually much closer to Him than is possible for us on this side of the grave. When the material body returns to the dust, the spirit returns to God who gave it. He is "the Father of spirits." From Him our spirits emanated when we came to this world, and to Him they ascend when we are called to depart from it. Whether they ever consciously existed before coming here, no one can authoritatively affirm or deny. In his "Ode on Immortality," Wordsworth has said,

*"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises in us, our life's star,
Hath elsewhere had its setting,
And cometh from afar."*

But, so far as we know, Jesus never taught that

doctrine. So far as the record shows, He said nothing about any previous existence of the souls of mankind. But, just before His crucifixion, He did say to His disciples, "I go unto the Father," and, again, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."

There is a sense in which Jesus was always with the Father, and in which we ourselves can be with Him on this side of the grave. We can know Him here to some extent, and can hold very sweet communion with Him; but not as in the spirit world. Here we can only see Him as through a glass darkly and can have only an imperfect degree of communion with Him; but there we shall see Him much more clearly, and know Him much more intelligently, and commune with Him much more intimately. We shall be more conscious of His nearness, and of His fatherly love for us. Many things which are now mysterious in regard to Him will be plain to us. We shall see the true meaning of the way in which He has treated us, and shall be drawn to Him with a confidence beyond that which we experience in the life that now is.

While he was wandering in a far country, the prodigal knew that his father still remained in the old homestead; and that was why he returned to it. He was drawn to it by a consciousness of the relationship between them, and by a desire to have his father's forgiveness and helpfulness. But when he had arrived, and was made to realize the full extent of his father's great love for him, then, as never before, he was spiritually drawn to him; and never before had his home meant so much to him. And similarly, when we enter the spirit world, a realizing sense of God's nearness and love for us will make that world a blessed home

to us. Sinners though we are, it will be home to us because our heavenly Father is there, and we shall realize His loving kindness as Jesus Christ has declared it to us.

And to those who believe in Christ and love Him, His presence there will also make that world seem homelike. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also," said He to His disciples; and, oh, how the prospect of meeting Him there must have illumined that world for them; and how homelike it must have seemed to them on account of that meeting, as one by one they entered there!

The apostle Paul had never known Jesus Christ in the flesh, but so great was his love for Him that he wished to depart from this world in order to be in His company. "We are confident," said he, "and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord"; and, again, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." And so our Saviour's presence there—the presence of Him Who so loved us that He laid down His life for us—will help to make the spirit world a home-like place for each and all of us.

And, oh, how many dearly loved ones are now awaiting us there? Not only is our heavenly Father there, and He Who suffered on the cross for us, but a multitude of friends and relatives who have departed from this earthly shore. Parents, and children, and brothers, and sisters, and many other loved ones have

gone on before us; and where they are will be home to us. There we shall find every one of them; and there we shall love them, and be loved by them, more than ever before. They will not have forgotten us, nor shall we fail to remember them, nor will the former bonds of affection be weakened in any way. Nay,

*“He who plants within our hearts
All this deep affection,
Giving, when the form departs,
Fadeless recollection,
Will but clasp the unbroken chain
Closer when we meet again.”*

And after we ourselves shall have entered there, all whom we leave behind will eventually follow us, to enlarge the home circle and to increase the home feeling as the years pass away. And there at last we shall fully realize that all mankind are related to us as children of the self-same Father, members of the same great family, towards each and every one of whom we shall have a correspondingly affectionate feeling. All worldly distinctions will have been buried in the grave, and every human soul will be joyfully recognized as a member of the same great spiritual and heavenly family, equally at home in the wonderful dwelling place to which the grave is but a doorway so far as the soul is concerned.

And there at last all alike will be holy and happy. The ills that human flesh is heir to cannot enter the spirit world. No physical sickness or pain or decrepitude can there trouble or threaten us. No carnal temptations, no lust for material possessions or pleasures, can there lead us to disobey the commandments of God. But repentance for former transgressions can

enter there; and resolutions for a more spiritual life can be formed there; and an abundance of spiritual help can be found there; and the best employment of those who have made the most progress will surely be to help those who are most deeply in need of it. The spiritually strong will bear the burdens of the spiritually weak. Guardian angels will care for undeveloped souls. And God and Christ will ceaselessly carry on Their ministry till all souls shall be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect.

Oh, blessed assurance that such a home is awaiting us! Let us look joyfully forward to it, and not live as if this world were all. Let us consider this world as our field of labour, from which we shall soon go to our spiritual home as toilers go to their earthly homes at the close of the day. Or let us consider it as a place of education, from which we shall soon go to our spiritual home as children go home when they are dismissed by their school-teacher; or as a battlefield in which we are fighting in the cause of humanity, from which we shall soon go to our spiritual home as faithful soldiers go home when their enlistment is ended. And, so regarding it, let us set not our hearts on material things; nor give way to despondency because of the trials which come to us; nor mourn without hope when death enters our households and takes those who are dear to us; nor fear to encounter it when we are summoned to follow them; but press steadily onward to our heavenly home, and so live that when we enter there we may look back on an earthly life well spent, and be greeted not only with love but with approbation by the glorified ones who are awaiting us there.

EVANGELISTIC WORK

OZORA H. DAVIS, D.D.

President Chicago Theological Seminary.

Preaching the Social Gospel

\$1.50.

The new book by the author of "Evangelistic Preaching" is the *next book* every preacher should read. As a high authority recently said "Every preacher needs to read books on preaching and the problems of preaching and should read one such book every year." It would be difficult to find a book that fits this need better than this latest work of President Davis'.

J. WILBUR CHAPMAN, D.D.

Evangelistic Sermons

Edited and Compiled by Edgar Whitaker Work, D.D., with Frontispiece. \$1.50.

Strong, fervid gospel addresses, eminently characteristic of one of the great evangelists of his time. Dr. Work has used his editorial prerogatives with pronounced skill. As a result every paragraph is reminiscent of Dr. Chapman, and from every page of the book one seems to hear again the voice and compelling message of one who while living preached to possibly as many people as any man of his generation, who "being dead yet speaketh."

LOUIS ALBERT BANKS, D.D.

Author of "Thirty-one Revival Sermons"

The New Ten Commandments

and Other Sermons.

\$1.50.

Strong, stirring Gospel addresses reflecting the true evangelical note, Dr. Banks' latest volume, fully maintains his impressive, picturesque style of presentation. Apt quotation, fitting illustration, drawn from literature and human life give point and color to his work, which is without a dull or meaningless page.

FRANK CHALMERS McKEAN, A.M., D.D.

The Magnetism of Mystery

and Other Sermons

Introduction by J. A. Marquis, D.D. \$1.25

Dr. John A. Marquis says: "Dr. McKean's sermons are shafts with points, and he hurls them with vigor and sureness. They will be read with interest, not only for what they are in themselves, but as types of the pulpit ministry that is making the Church of the Middle West."

HELPFUL SERMONS

JAMES I. VANCE, D.D., LL.D.

Pastor First Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tenn.

In the Breaking of the Bread

Communion Addresses.

\$1.25.

"A volume of communion addresses marked by deep spiritual insight and knowledge of the human heart. They are well adapted to awaken the spiritual conceptions which should accompany the observance of the Lord's Supper—suggestions fitted for a communion occasion. The addresses all bear upon the general theme of the Lord's Supper and showed marked spirituality of thought and fervency of expression."—*United Presbyterian*.

TEUNIS E. GOUWENS

Pastor Second Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Ky.

The Rock That Is Higher

And Other Addresses.

\$1.25.

An unusually successful volume of discourses of which Dr. Charles S. Macfarland of the Church Federal Council, says: "Contents the intellect because it first satisfies the heart, and commands the incontestable assent of human experience..... As I have read it I have found my conscience penetrated, my faith deepened and my hope quickened."

W. RUSSELL BOWIE, D.D.

Rector of St. Paul's Church, Richmond, Va.

The Road of the Star

and Other Sermons.

\$1.50.

A volume of addresses which bring the message of Christianity with fresh and kindling interpretation to the immediate needs of men. The extraordinary distinction of Dr. Bowie's preaching rises from the fact that to great vigor of thought he has added the winged power of an imagination essentially poetic.

JOSEPH JUDSON TAYLOR, D.D., LL.D.

Author of "The Sabbath Question," "The God of War," etc.

Radiant Hopefulness

\$1.00.

A message of enheartenment, a word of cheer, for men and women whose hearts have been fearful, whose spirits have been shaken in the turbulent times through which the world has passed in recent years, with which mankind still finds itself faced. In this volume of addresses, Dr. Taylor points the way to comfort amid confusion, to peaceful harborage amid the prevailing storm.

STANDARD REFERENCE WORKS

G. B. F. HALLOCK

Editor of "The Expositor."

A Modern Cyclopedia of Illustrations for All Occasions

Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-eight Illustrations. \$3.00.

A comprehensive collection of illustrative incidents, anecdotes and other suggestive material for the outstanding days and seasons of the church year. The author, well-known to the readers of "*The Expositor*," has presented a really valuable handbook for Preachers, Sunday School Superintendents and all Christian workers.

JAMES INGLIS

The Bible Text Cyclopedia

A Complete Classification of Scripture Texts.
New Edition. Large 8vo, \$2.00

"More sensible and convenient, and every way more satisfactory than any book of the kind we have ever known. We know of no other work comparable with it in this department of study."—*Sunday School Times*.

ANGUS-GREEN

Cyclopedic Handbook to the Bible

By Joseph Angus. Revised by Samuel G. Green.

New Edition. 832 pages, with Index, \$3.00.

"The Best thing in its line."—*Ira M. Price, Univ. of Chicago*.

"Holds an unchallenged place among aids to the interpretation of the Scriptures."—*Baptist Review and Expositor*.

"Of immense service to Biblical students."—*Methodist Times*.

The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge

Introduction by R. A. Torrey

Consisting of 500,000 Scripture References and Parallel Passages. 788 pages. 8vo. Cloth. \$3.00.

"Bible students who desire to compare Scripture with Scripture will find the 'Treasury' to be a better help than any other book of which I have any knowledge."—*R. R. McBurney, Former Gen. Sec., Y. M. C. A., New York*.

A. R. BUCKLAND, Editor

Universal Bible Dictionary

511 pages. 8vo. Cloth. \$3.00.

Dr. Campbell Morgan says: "Clear, concise, comprehensive. I do not hesitate to say that if any student would take the Bible, and go through it book by book with its aid, the gain would be enormous."

PRAYER, DEVOTIONAL, ETC.

J. D. JONES, D.D. *Author of "St. Paul's Certainties."*

The King of Love

Meditations on The Twenty-third Psalm. \$1.25.

Dr. Jones is one of the greatest of living preachers, and on both sides of the Atlantic, his splendid gifts are fully recognized. The clear, eloquent, and deeply devotional character of his work makes it specially interesting. The meditations literally breathe counsel and enheartenment.

LYNN HAROLD HOUGH, D.D.

The Strategy of the Devotional Life

75c.

Amid the vast life of a great city, the problem of sustaining true spiritual life is a problem of increasing gravity and difficulty. The "strategy" of the process as Dr. Hough so ably calls it, is discussed in the pages of his new book, with convincing clarity.

HENRY VAN DYKE, D.D.

Thy Sea is Great--Our Boats Are Small and Other Hymns of To-day.

50c.

A number of new hymns written by a recognized master of true lyrical expression. These verses Dr. van Dyke describes as an attempt to give expression to certain present day aspirations not possibly finding utterance before.

FRANK W. GUNSAULUS, D.D.

Prayers of Frank W. Gunsaulus

\$1.25.

"Dr. Gunsaulus was one of the most richly-endowed preachers of his generation, and his prayers reflect a mind and heart wondrously attuned to the harmonies of the Highest."—*Christian Work*.

J. PATERSON-SMYTH, LL.D., D.C.L.

Author of "The Gospel of the Hereafter."

On the Rim of the World

75c

"These answers to questions about the hereafter are based on the New Testament. Here is a book that makes for faith and courage and hope and sanity. It was not written to convince unbelievers, but to console and comfort Christians whose knowledge is altogether too small on this most vital matter. And this task the author has well performed."—*C. E. World*.

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: May 2006

PreservationTechnologies

A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 016 162 171 7